

Hamlet-Time

PATRICK PRIMAVESI

The dramatic work of Shakespeare is a persistent reflection on time, in particular his *Hamlet*. But the meaning of time and temporality in this play goes far beyond the fulfillment of a tragic revenge, and it can scarcely be realized by counting out the difference between the duration of a represented action and the act of representation itself. On the other hand, philosophical interpretations of Hamlet's mentality, his ideas of existence, and in particular his remark that "the time is out of joint", tend to miss the theatrical dimension of the problem. The question of temporality, like most of the issues raised by Shakespeare's plays, will not find a single answer or solution which could be finally ascertained in a scholarly text or debate. Any attempt to explore this field has to acknowledge that the dramatic text of Shakespeare's plays is the actual result of stage practice. And that dimension should not be confined to historical research on Elizabethan theatre, but concerns today's theatre as well.

To examine this assumption the following remarks will develop some aspects of time in *Hamlet* in the light of a theatrical work which reflected in all its decisions time as a problem and as a material: the 1995 production *HAMLET a monologue* by the American director Robert Wilson.

Blue light. A body lying on a stack of layers, slabs of rock or ledgers perhaps from a grave, ice blocks or wood from a funeral pyre. Slowly the figure emerges, raising a voice very low but clear: *Had I but time*. The sentence Hamlet utters in the last moment before his death, before his

friend Horatio gives the order that he should be exhibited on a stage, like those baroque catafalques where the corpse was displayed or covered with splendid sculptures. *Had I but time*. The sentence which is used in Shakespeare's play to express a certain demand for repetition. According to Hamlet's concern about his "wounded name" the whole story of treacherous killing, revenge and death should be revealed and told again. This can be regarded as the focus for Wilson's approach to the play.

The director and performer is well known for his specific concern with time – not only the time of his own life, constantly occupied with preparations for his international projects, but particularly the time and temporality of theatre and performance. In his earlier productions up to *the CIVIL warS*, the extraordinary duration of the performances and the extreme slowing down of all movements served to break and transform the perceptual habits of the audience. From its very beginning, Wilson's theatre caused at least one intense and irritating impression: "It's about time".¹

At present, the question of time in the theatre is a crucial concern when new media and electronic networks are radically changing the conditions of our perception. Wilson's theatre has always reflected this process and obviously it was a question of time that he produced his own version of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. Among the different aspects of time reflected in the play, it is in particular the conflict between an individual notion

of time and a temporality beyond human perception that constitutes a challenge for every (post)modern director. As the following remarks will point out, Wilson's *Hamlet* can be regarded as a model for theatrical reflections on time and temporality – between text and performance, epic and dramatic theatre, history and event.

REFLECTION, MEMORY AND TIME

HAMLET a monologue, first performed in 1995 in Houston, Texas, and in the following years on tour in Europe (Berlin, Venice, Paris, Lisbon, Helsinki and Vienna) worked rather on the condensation and intensification of briefest moments than on a continuous development of the plot. Thus it brought out a specific theatricality in Hamlet's lamentation about the loss of time: *Had I but time*. A sentence about the transitoriness of the theatre as well, spoken by the director (Wilson) who played an actor who plays a director (Hamlet). This mirror casting underlined another element of Shakespeare's text – the tension between character and function, reality and play, action and reflection. A process of remembrance and memory was displayed on the level of the theatre production too, because Wilson picked up the trace of Heiner Müller's *Hamlet-machine* (which he had directed in 1986) and of his earlier performances where he had already acted himself. Regarding these parallels, which will be discussed in the following, the question of changes and developments in Wilson's theatrical work presents itself immediately.

Time-travelling is a basic element of Wilson's theatre, playfully demonstrated in his *Timerocker-musical* (produced in 1996 together with Lou Reed in Hamburg). The monologue recalled the horizon of the traditional *dramatic* theatre and reflected the staging of *Hamlet* as an impossible task of reconstruction. But it demonstrated as well the actual importance of the text: if (post)-modern theatre is still about time, it remains a part of the universe of *Hamlet* and its experience

of temporality. The text articulates a demand which the theatre can neither fulfil nor simply ignore. Wilson enacted this paradox by reinforcing the temporal structure of the play against itself – in a process of remembrance, recalling and yet betraying the demand of the ghost which is also the demand of the drama. In this process his performance also revealed what Prince Hamlet has always been as a *theatrical* appearance, evermore returning in the futile hope of redemption: a hero beyond heroism, a theatre ghost whose comeback marks a split or rupture of time itself.

HAMLET a monologue marked a necessary point zero, a rock bottom for the history of European drama and theatre. Almost every word of Shakespeare's text is burdened with a wide range of interpretative strategies and also with the heritage of grand gestures, unique theatrical achievements and ever new attempts to update the famous revenge story for the theatre. According to Wilson himself, his Hamlet-monologue was no longer bound to a certain historical period. It was rather interspersed with different layers of time: elements of the Renaissance as well as the present time of the nineties and the future of the year 3000.² Instead of proposing the mere timelessness of the classical play his production revealed an irretrievable loss of time, an extreme tension between fleetingness and duration, uniqueness and repetition. Thus the idea of a cyclic structure in the utopian call for a new beginning was performed.

DEATH, PLAY AND MONTAGE

In Shakespeare's *Hamlet* it is an almost comic representation of death which transforms the tragic matter into a new economy of *play*. The dead bodies call for an interpretation that only the repetition of the play might give to the "yet unknowing" world, although it would lead to the same disorder. In this perspective there is no more difference between the stage of death and the

stage of the play – their functions merge into one, in the way Walter Benjamin had shown with regard to the baroque court stage in his profound study about the German *mourning play* (Trauerspiel).³

At the beginning of his monologue Wilson repeated the sentence *Had I but time* three times, and it was not until the ending of the performance that he finished this line, only to break off once more: "Had I but time, as this fell sergeant, Death, / Is strict in his arrest. O. I could tell you - / But let it be - - - the rest is silence." This interlocking from beginning and end already indicates the montage technique on which Wilson's play with time was based. The most important scenes of *Hamlet* were combined by a kaleidoscopic dramaturgy not only of acceleration or abbreviation but also of delay, interruption and sudden standstill. Together with his dramaturg Wolfgang Wiens, Wilson had transformed the text of the drama into a review that recalls almost all the scenes of the play by quoting and playing fragments of them – starting from the very last moment before Hamlet dies.

As in all his productions, Wilson began the preparatory work with a series of drawings in order to construct a storyboard for the performance. In the program (the leaflet version handed out to the spectators of the tour performances) there were fifteen diagram sketches combined with short descriptions of the scenes. The first drawing showed a few horizontal strokes, with on top something like a figure: a short stroke for the head, suspended on the white ground, while the body resembled the other strokes, as if Hamlet was lying on a stack of bodies. Picture and text commented on each other – beneath the title "1 THE SLEEP OF DEATH" this first scene was briefly described: "Hamlet aufgebahrt. Die letzten Sekunden seines Lebens ziehen an ihm vorüber: das Gefecht mit Laertes, das Gift, das seine Mutter trank, der Tod des Königs, seine eigene tödliche Verwundung. Er erinnert sich, wie es zu diesem Ende gekommen war: wie der Geist

seines toten Vaters ihn fortgelockt hatte".⁴ With the titles only and without the longer descriptions (which were used for the tour programs), the pictures open up a space for imagination and remembrance as well, as in the baroque tradition of emblematic pictures. But the gap between word and image, body and meaning, remains, revealed to the spectator as reader *and* beholder. As in the performance itself the abbreviation suggests a new and different experience of time, leaving out the dramatic development from scene to scene and cutting off the psychological time structure of the play.

In addition to the horizontal relation between image and word, there is a vertical tension between the images themselves and between the different titles, stimulating the imagination of the spectator and allowing different constructions of the story. The simplicity and the abstract schemes of the pictures meet with the concrete imagery of the quoted lines or with their communicative impact ("Be thou a spirit"). (See plate I) By a similar technique of fragmentation and montage, the performance reflected a specific temporality of the theatre. Wilson enacted the scene of remembrance, but the monologue's memory did not produce a continuous order of events. Rather it was an irritating flashback of Hamlet's many attempts to reconstruct the past order in the present. Therefore, the *event* to be constructed was itself nothing but remembrance, the presence of an absence. Not so much the personal remembrance of an imaginary character was represented but rather the incompleteness of any belated explanation. And this lack of coherence in the *story* opened up a time frame for the theatre as such, exposing the temporality and the historicity of the *playing* of Hamlet. Thus the performance could be experienced as an ironic commentary on Shakespeare's drama and on almost four hundred years of history of the theatre, including an earlier approach to the play by Wilson himself.

HAMLETMACHINE

Wilson had directed Heiner Müller's text *Hamletmachine* 1986 in New York and in the same year at the Thalia Theater in Hamburg with drama students. *Hamletmachine* initiated what may be regarded as Wilson's turn to European forms of dramaturgy. And it was probably the most intelligent *time machine* that (post)modern theatre has produced so far. The fundamental distinction between the time told and the time of telling, between the time represented and the time of theatrical representation itself, was crossed. The discontinuous dynamic of this performance corresponded exactly to the dramaturgical logic of Müller's text. Ten years later, in an interview about his *monologue*, Wilson stated once more that his idea of theatre had been strongly influenced and also changed by Müller's work.⁵ This applies in particular to the deconstructive work on a canonical text like Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. But what are the consequences for the theatre as stage practice and performance?

Obviously it is almost impossible to produce Müller's *Hamletmachine* as a 'drama' with characters, dialogues, plots and conventional scenes. Rather it is a postdramatic text which reflects the loss of any identity by a rupture, a radical splitting and decomposition not only of the main character. The text also challenges the interpretative strategies developed by contemporary directors used to conveying an explicit message to their audience. The text is still divided into five parts (the third named "scherzo", as in classical symphony). But this framing, applied to the new epic material, functions rather as a formalization that deconstructs the logic of Shakespeare's dramatic dialogues. In fact, the outstanding quality of *Hamletmachine* as theatre text is inseparable from its resistance to theatrical representation in any conventional way.

The traditional hierarchy comprising dialogue as 'main text' and descriptions of the stage, of facial expressions or movements as mere supple-

ments, is replaced by a complex montage of speech levels, adding to a scenery or landscape of text which can scarcely be converted into a coherent story. This was quite important for Wilson because his own theatrical work had always focused on formal and musical patterns and not so much on the meaning and the development of dramatic plots. For *Hamletmachine* he invented a unique model of repetition, a specific rhythm for the movements of the actors and of the stage as well.

The same choreography was repeated five times, but each time turned forward by ninety degrees, together with the whole set. In each section of the text the audience was confronted with a different perspective on the 'same' arrangements and movements. Thus the tension between actor and role, scenic action and dramatic story, that characterizes Müller's text, was not just represented but transformed into a new framework of temporal and spatial relations. Its very distance towards interpretation, and the way it irritated the perceptual habits of the audience by a visible conversion of the theatre apparatus, constituted the political dimension of this performance, its statement.⁶

TEXT, TIME AND MEDIA

The performance of *Hamletmachine* used the text rather as material than as a continuous narrative structure. So the text was one element of the score among others, not more important than the music or the independent scheme of movements. In this framework, time could be experienced also on a very practical level; like dancers almost free from any psychology of characters and situations, the actors were forced to count by themselves to fit their movements into the time scheme of the performance. As a kind of guideline there was the repetitive sound of a wooden stick beating on another piece of wood. This constant beat not only helped the actors to find their cues but also produced, as an integral part of the music, a

meditative and sometimes psychedelic soundsphere.

The basic equality of the different elements of the performance was demonstrated also by the *Scherzo*-part, when the rotation of the scene suddenly led into the projection of a video film with a digitally-manipulated version of the scene. In front of the audience a screen was installed, obscuring the rest of the stage. The video projection showed the actors in the same order as before but with some spectacular effects: the men suddenly started to burn until they vanished completely, the women mutated into gorillas while the background showed the short rise and seemingly endless crash of the Challenger rocket in a glowing blue sky. These visual effects were accompanied by Franz Schubert's song *Der Zwerg* (The Dwarf), sung by Jessye Norman. The text part 3 *Scherzo. Universität der Toten* (university of the dead) was not spoken but displayed as a subtitle of the projection, the letters moving from right to left. Finally, when all the actors had suddenly reappeared, the image faded into a pattern of increasing square fields while the scale of the total image shrank continuously until the screen was entirely black.

Thus a specific condition of the medium video was demonstrated, that its images are an assemblage of different manipulable informations. The time and speed of the visual sphere were displayed in their independence of any represented movement – an experience which continued throughout the performance. Similar moments of formalization and analysis made the process of perception itself perceptible in all the slight changes of the repeated structure. And in just this process they rendered Müller's text as a unique framework for concurrent perspectives on the figure of Hamlet.

HAMLET-LANGUAGE

Already in the text of *Hamletmachine* the tension between acting and non-acting and also linguisti-

cally between German and English, translation and 'original', causes a permanent irritation: "Ich war Hamlet ... I'm good Hamlet gi'me a cause for grief", then, together with Horatio: "Ich wußte, daß du ein Schauspieler bist. Ich bin es auch, ich spiele Hamlet" and later, in the fourth part: "Ich bin nicht Hamlet. Ich spiele keine Rolle mehr".⁷ In the performance, this playing with the acceptance and the refusal of the role, described as taking off or putting on costume and mask, was articulated by different persons in a sequence of speech acts far from any dialogue. The text was distorted again and again by sounds of strangulation or leaps in the voice, sudden outbursts, shouting or whispering.

In a similar way Wilson's early performances, if they made use of speech at all, worked rather on the exhibition of body and voice than on the communication of a message. It is important to notice that this extreme treatment of language was never confined to a mere "theatre of images". And Wilson's later approach to dramatic texts and traditional operas did not, as often stated, betray the principles of his earlier works.

Taking into account all the differences between his productions of the last thirty years, there are some interesting parallels between the articulation of speechlessness or speech impediments and the later attempt to make the elaborated classical texts stutter and stumble. *Hamletmachine* for instance demonstrated the interruption of the smooth rhythm and of a harmonizing intonation cultivated in many German Shakespeare translations. The opposite technique of rupture, as it was used by Wilson's performance, releases a quality of poetic language that can be described with Julia Kristeva's term *semiotic*.⁸ The intermittence of the symbolic order caused by utterances of the body articulates the always unstable and precarious constitution of the subject in the field of language.

THEATRICALITY AND PERSONAL EXPERIENCE

Almost ten years after this *Hamletmachine*, Wilson's production *HAMLET a monologue* condensed Shakespeare's play into a very different, mainly artistic and comic form. And yet it would be too simple to interpret this new form only as the triumph of a rather traditional, 'human' way of acting and storytelling over the destructive effects of the *machine*. On the contrary – like the montage of the text, Wilson's acting in the monologue and Hans-Peter Kuhn's construction of an acoustic space may be regarded as an exemplary attempt to open new dimensions of theatricality in the age of electronic media.

The performance of *Hamletmachine* displayed with its choreographic structure and its scenery a clockwork stuttering or speeding along according to its own rules. But in the monologue, Wilson himself became this instrument of time, something like a *chronographic mime*. His statement that Hamlet was a very personal experience for him⁹ is based on the fact that he was able to work in this performance very precisely on his theatrical ideas about time. Again he was standing on stage, as in some of his earlier performances, for instance the *patio*-monologue ("I was sitting on my patio this guy appeared I thought I was hallucinating", 1977/78), which intensified daily life experiences with Hollywood-like effects of suspense. The show functioned as a reflection of a mind dispersed by the media: "My head became like a TV, switching from thought to thought (and in writing from phrase to phrase) like flipping a dial from channel to channel".¹⁰

A similar structure of leaps and switches could be observed twenty years later, in the theatrical memory of the monologue. Not only did the figure of Hamlet reflect the cruel deeds and the catastrophes of his imaginary past life; at the same time the actor/director Wilson obviously recycled some elements of his own performance history, thereby opening quite different levels of perception and association for the spectators. But

the most important element that *HAMLET a monologue* shared with Wilson's earlier performances was a playful and yet melancholy confrontation with death.

DEATH AND HUMOUR

The importance of death and dying for Wilson's work is already suggested by the titles of his productions: *Death Destruction and Detroit*, *The Malady of Death*, *La Mort de Molière*, *Danton's Death*, to name only the most obvious examples. In the series of these works, including *Medea*, *Alceste*, *King Lear*, *When we Dead awaken* and *Persephone* as border crossings between death and life,¹¹ the Hamlet-monologue occupies a significant position. The idea indicated already by Shakespeare himself, to replay the experience of life in the face of imminent death, could be interpreted as a sceptic or even existentialist preoccupation with the inevitable process of dying. But Hamlet's great monologues on being or non-being were scarcely a part of Wilson's *Monologue*-production, at least not in the way one might have expected from a serious Hamlet-actor. In comparison to *Hamletmachine*, the element of *humour* was decisively reinforced, as in those fairy tales where a humorous wit is the only force able to delay or at least to irritate the striking power of death.

In *HAMLET a monologue* the playing with extreme emotions and pathos-heightened reflections quite often turned into pure slapstick. This element also had its forerunners in Wilson's oeuvre: a large step towards his now frequent employment of comic ruptures was the famous musical production *The Black Rider* (together with Tom Waits and William Burroughs, Hamburg 1990). Important in this context are also the performance *La Douce / The meek girl* (1994/95) based on a novel by Dostoyevsky, when Wilson acted again himself for the first time after a long break, and his productions of plays by Gertrude Stein, *Doctor Faustus Lights the Lights* (1992) and

Saints & Singing (1997), and more recently Bertolt Brecht's *Ozeanflug* (1998 at the Berliner Ensemble, with Stefan Kurt as flying/crashing clown) or *Danton's Tod* (Salzburg/Berlin 1998), where a large number of comic interludes – up to the staging of the guillotine – decorated the moment of death with a wide range of theatrical gags.

In *HAMLET a monologue* it was in particular a situational humour that freed the text from the weight of traditional acting clichés. In the beginning, Wilson's play with the figure of Hamlet seemed to be located in something like the climate of a frozen waste or a mortuary, rejecting the pleasant temperature of sympathy and identification with the hero. The other extreme was reached by the comic effects and gags which produced sudden waves of excitement in the audience. Among all the jokes the most effective were those that played with the terror of an imminent death, disturbing the power of dying which is usually invoked by Hamlet's fate and by his reflections. A comic distance was indicated in the program by the title of the first scene, THE SLEEP OF DEATH. This could mean not only the sleep of the dead or the deadly sleep (of King Hamlet) but also the sleep of death – its absence – and therefore a delay granted to the one who is to die, just for the duration of his narration or his play (which could refer to the whole performance as well, as a period of time which death allows the theatre).

A comic ambiguity of this sleep was also illustrated on stage. Close to Wilson's head, when he was lying on the stack of ledgers, a white hand could be seen. (See plate II).

Certainly the hand was Wilson's own, but because of its twisted position and the precisely focused light it looked like the hand of someone else, perhaps of his dead father struggling to get out of the grave and 'suppressed' by the Hamlet-actor. This instant condensed the dramaturgy of the whole performance: in the very moment of his flashback Hamlet already knows that he will meet a ghost whose instructions he has to fol-

low, however suspect and in the end deadly they might be.

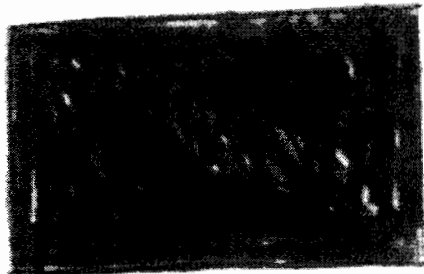
In the third scene Wilson played the encounter with that ghost: not just remembering it by speaking to himself, but enacting the confrontation physically. Always alone on stage, he showed a Hamlet facing his own situation and addressing the other 'figures' involved, the ghost of his father, his uncle, and his mother: "O vengeance! / O most pernicious woman! / O villain, villain, smiling, damned villain!" The moment of realization, the task of remembrance and vengeance and the notion that "time is out of joint" were condensed in a monumental posture: the armed hero standing on the grave, ready to fight against the powers of darkness, his shiny design sword drawn. But just by virtue of its perfection this warlike attitude was turned into something ridiculous, a mere pose, by which Hamlet's revenge seemed doomed to failure from the beginning. (See plate III).

As an example of Wilson's detailed choreography, these opening scenes of the performance showed that the play of the body is always able to cross and subvert the dramatic text. The physical appearance of the performer was split into different elements, parts and attitudes, analyzing not only the character but also the rhetoric structures of the play. And the language of this monologue was never confined to a mere recitation of the text. The discontinuous quotations, sometimes with every line from a different scene of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, were part of a soundscape as well. So the acoustic space of the theatre was explored by the overlapping of the single voice with the electronically modified and distorted echos. Then there were all kinds of sound effects known from comedy films and slapstick shows, particularly the noise of smashed glasses or bowls off-stage, as a surprising effect of apparently harmless movements by the actor.

The performance of *Hamletmachine* played already with similar effects, for instance when in part 4 (PEST IN BUDA SCHLACHT UM



1 The sleep of death



2 be thou a spirit



3 murder most foul

Plate I: Robert Wilson, the first three of fifteen storyboard sketches for *HAMLET a monologue*. Alley Theatre, Houston, Texas 1995. Courtesy Byrd Hoffman Foundation New York.



Plate II: Robert Wilson in Scene 1 of *HAMLET a monologue*. Alley Theatre, Houston, Texas 1995. Courtesy Byrd Hoffman Foundation New York.

Plate III: Robert Wilson in Scene 3 of *HAMLET a monologue*. Alley Theatre, Houston, Texas 1995. Courtesy Byrd Hoffman Foundation New York.



GRÖNLAND) the man in a suit after the long drawled word "Naaarbe" (scar) picked an imaginary insect from the air and dropped 'it', which action was answered after a while by a loud crash from off-stage, as if something had fallen into a deep hole.

In *HAMLET a monologue* the tension of such moments was raised to the level of slapstick. During the scene when Hamlet forges his plan to play a fool, the material of words went out of control. The important decision "To put an antic disposition on" was transformed by the repetition of single syllables into an artificial stutter, and the following sentence "And what so poor a man as Hamlet is" was given an intonation that recalled Wilson's and Christopher Knowles' production *A Letter for Queen Victoria* (1974) rather than Shakespeare's drama: "And what(t-t-t) so poor A man as HAMlet is" (capitals indicate the stressed syllables).¹² As if the unconscious had forced the articulation into a new meaning, this irregular emphasis of some isolated syllables reduced the prince to the flesh: *A HAM*.

After this pun the stuttering voice corresponded comically to the buzzing sound of an imaginary fly that did not fall silent until Wilson, wildly punching around, hit the 'catchword' *true*: "That he is mad(d-d-d) 'tis true, 'tis pity./ And pity 'tis 'tis TRUE -". Then he continued with Hamlet's strategy: "Mad call I it, for to define true mad-NESS,/ What is't but TO BE -" (here Wilson seemed to switch by a very pathetic movement from these keywords into the phrase "to be or not to be", but then suddenly paused and, with some laughter in the audience, completed the former sentence) " - nothing else but mad?"

Wilson's talent for blowing up Shakespeare's quibbles and puns with an exaggerated intonation exposed death and madness to laughter. But with these slapstick elements he managed to draw the audience's attention again to some 'worn out' parts of the text. An important condition for this was also the balance between the theatricalization of music, voice and noises and, on the other hand,

the spectacle, the visible play with props, handpuppets and costumes. With the metal rings, which he used instead of the painted portraits to compare the royal brothers, Wilson dealt like a tumbler, as if the accusation against his mother was a kind of magic trick as well. Thus even his emotional outbursts, that surprised Wilson's mellow critics, were veritable show effects.

For instance the scene with the actors, when he put two white balls with stretched out fingers before his eyes, switching with this simple and monstrous mask from his monologue to the narration of Pyrrhus: "The rugged Pyrrhus, / couched in th'ominous horse, / And over-sized with coagulate gore, / With eyes like carbuncles, / Old grandsire Priam seeks". Or the murder of Polonius: with great passion Wilson stabbed at the black curtain and, as a result, pulled out a fish-shaped glove representing Polonius' dead body, which he mocked and condescendingly slipped off his sword.

FINAL CHANGES

The performance situation of the monologue reinforced the autonomy of the deadly props which is characteristic of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* as of many revenge dramas. In the finale, Wilson unpacked the costumes of his imaginary colleagues from an old-fashioned chest and placed them around himself for the last farewell. It was up to the spectators of these scenes whether they perceived a playing child or a fool who should not be roused from his hallucinations. But these quiet moments did not last - from one moment to the next they could turn into a firework display of light beams, flashes and loud explosions. The melancholic mood was also disturbed by the dance sections with their rhythmical melody reminiscent of a musical clock. Then Wilson appeared with constantly differently-shaped hats¹³ behaving like a great diva. Or the *nummery*-scene, when he played with the affectation of an

imaginary distracted Ophelia. The audience was put on high voltage by sudden light changes for only a few seconds, as later on in the recall of the final duel with Laertes.

But the comic play was interrupted too, by the present time of a sudden ending when the imminence of death was no longer to be delayed. Thus the monologue displayed a permanent rupture of expectations and moods, an amalgamation of despair and fun, mourning and play until the end. No Fortinbras appeared and no army whose drums and music would have turned the silence of Hamlet's death into a military campaign. The crucial statement "The rest is silence" was placed at the very end of the performance. Thus it indicated not only, as in Shakespeare's play, the certainty of eternal rest or at least the hope of it,

but also the process of *ending* in theatre, when the 'real time' of the performance breaks off in a last moment of silence. Instead of the military parade the audience's applause started just in time to prove Wilson's monologue to be a collective event and not the isolated or even autistic appearance of someone replaying *Hamlet*-fragments to himself.

The images remaining of the performer's body, of his pathetic cries and his ironic gags, mark a trace in the scenic memory of the spectators - an unfinished and shared rest that may provoke new and other performances. Just as the phantoms of *Hamletmachine* are always searching for new successors and *revenants*, this Hamlet-monologue was definitely not the last one. Time is up. The rest is theatre.

NOTES

- 1 Cf. the article by Francesco Quadri, "It's about Time", *Artforum*, October 1984, p. 76ff.
- 2 Robert Wilson in an interview that is part of the video-documentation *The Making of a Monologue: Robert Wilson's Hamlet* by Marion Kessel (Conwell Foundation of the Arts, 1995).
- 3 Cf. Walter Benjamin, "Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels", in ders., *Gesammelte Schriften*, Vol. I, (Frankfurt/Main 1972), p. 334f. For an analysis of the end of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, see Patrick Primavesi, *Kommentar, Übersetzung, Theater in Walter Benjamins frühen Schriften*, (Frankfurt/Main 1998), p. 291ff.
- 4 Program of the performance in Berlin, Hebbel-Theater. An English translation of this German scene description would be something

- like: "Hamlet laid out. The last seconds of his life passing through his mind: the duel with Laertes, the poison his mother drank, the death of the king, his own deadly wound. He remembers how it came to this end: how his dead father's ghost had lured him away".
- 5 "Ich habe mich Heiner Müller immer sehr nahe gefühlt, er hat meine ganze Auffassung vom Theater verändert." ("I felt always very close to Heiner Müller, he has changed my whole view of the theatre.") Robert Wilson in an interview with Rüdiger Schaper, "Überall ist Texas", *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 23/24 March 1996.
- 6 Cf. the different judgements by critics, for instance Benjamin Heinrichs, "Sachsen ist nicht Texas", *Die Zeit*, 10 October 1986 and

- Klaus Wagner, "Ein magisches Quadrat aus lauter letzten Bildern", *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 6 October 1986 and, as an informative analysis, Hans-Thies Lehmann, "Robert Wilson Szenograph", *Parkett* 16, 1988, p. 39ff. For the idea of *landscape* in Wilson's Theatre see also Lehmann, *Postdramatisches Theater*, (Frankfurt/Main 1999), p. 129ff.
- 7 Heiner Müller, *Hamletmaschine*, in ders. *Mausier*, (Berlin 1983), p. 89, 90 and 93.
- 8 Cf. Julia Kristeva, *La révolution du langage poétique*, (Paris 1974), p. 17ff and 94ff.
- 9 Robert Wilson, interview with Rüdiger Schaper, cited above.
- 10 Robert Wilson, " ... I thought I was hallucinating", *Drama Review*, December 1977, p. 76.
- 11 See Patrick Primavesi, "Ritual and Formalization. Approaches to Greek Tragedy and Myth in the Work of Robert Wilson", in *(Dis)placing Classical Greek Theatre*, ed. E. Sakellaridou and S. Patsalides, (Thessaloniki 1999) and Erika Fischer-Lichte, "Auf dem Weg ins Reich der Schatten. Robert Wilsons Frankfurter *King Lear*-Inszenierung", in *Welttheater – Nationaltheater?*, ed. E. Fischer-Lichte (Tübingen 1993), p. 203ff.
- 12 In the first scene of the performance the opening title "A letter for Queen Victoria" was splintered by a repeatedly screamed "A", which was later on confronted by a "B" and an adherent phrase ("B-cause Emily watches the TV"). Thus the interjection of initials produced a specific melody and rhythm.
- 13 As part of the costume the four different hats for the monologue were made by Frieda Parmeggiani. According to her, Wilson played also with his own clothes: "Sein Kostüm ist ja auch variabel: Sobald er die Hose hochstülpt, wird sein Anzug zur Renaissancesilhouette." Interview with Holm Keller, in ders. *Robert Wilson*, (Frankfurt/Main 1997), p. 49.