I Was Hamlet—Cunning Scenes And Family Albums

Eda Čufer

(In Memory of My Father, 1936-2010)

Introduction

In 1982 and 1983, while studying at the University of Ljubljana's theatre academy, I attended two events performed by the art and music group Laibach.[1] More than 30 years later I would like to revisit this experience to explain how I have come to understand what I witnessed as a contemporary example of the "mousetrap"—the "cunning scene" invented by Shakespeare and enacted by his character Hamlet in the early 17th century play of the same title.[2]

The trick of challenging and undoing the hidden theatre of political power and intrigues through the art of theatre—which is how we, rather romantically, interpreted the "mousetrap" motif as students—resurfaced in my contemporary social and political consciousness when during the 1980s Yugoslavia's own version of socialism (self-managed socialism) was falling apart. Seeing Laibach's performance was empowering for my generation, one still in our early twenties at the time. If we could challenge the dominant ideology of a socialist state

Eda Čufer is a dramaturg, curator and writer, whose essays on theater, dance, and visual art have appeared in many books and journals. She co-founded the Slovenian theater group GSSN (Scipion Nasice Sisters Theater) in 1983, and and a year later she co-founded the art collective NSK (Neue Slowenische Kunst) based in Ljubljana. Her writing has appeared in *Art Forum* and *Maska*, as well as in books published by MOMA, MIT Press, Revolver, Afterall Books, Sternberg Press, Whitechapel Gallery, and others. She recently co-edited the book *NSK from Kapital to Capital*, which was published simultaneously with the NSK retrospective. She is now working on a book project, *Art as Mousetrap*, with the support of a grant from the Andy Warhol/Creative Capital Foundation. This new project concerns the Shakespeearean "stategem of mousetrap," and its relevance for contemporary performative and activist art. She is an assistant professor in Academic Studies and Art History at the Maine College of Art.

[1] Laibach (founded in 1980) is part of the art collective NSK, founded in Slovenia, former Yugoslavia, in 1984. http://www.laibach.org/

[2] For accompanying video samples of Laibach performances and interviews, see http://liminalities.net/12-2/hamlet.html

that—so we felt—oppressed us with its militaristic rhetoric and behavior we might yet have a chance. Various types of real socialist states in Eastern Europe built on the Soviet model of the USSR—the mother country that once represented a monumental alternative to imperialism and capitalism as epitomized by the 1917 proletarian revolution—began to deteriorate between 1965 and 1985. Shortly thereafter, the majority of the real socialist states in Europe, in something of a rather unexpected development, collapsed.

What fascinated me about the early Laibach performances I attended in the early 1980s was not so much the "political unconscious" of the late socialist Yugoslavia that they exposed, but the fact that they constituted a play-within-a-play (a mousetrap), which managed to completely elude the very form and idea of the canonic European theatre with which Shakespeare and Hamlet are usually associated—and which I was in the process of embracing as a professional dramaturge. As a consequence of the experience and ensuing contemplation these two performances made me question not only the authority of the political system of the socialist country in which I was born (and which Laibach's "cunning scenes" presumably critiqued), but also the institutionalized canonic European theater whose conventions I was learning to master.

Following a chain of events and upheavals that began in the 1980s, socialist Yugoslavia fell apart amidst a particularly violent war. By 1991, my country of birth—Yugoslavia—was gone. I never pursued my career in the institutional / national theatre, but instead took part in its deconstruction as a member of an art collective called NSK. In the two-part essay that follows, I reflect upon certain dramaturgical themes connecting the historic context and structure of Shakespeare's play *Hamlet* (Part I) and the fall of socialism in Eastern Europe, as viewed through the decline of drama theatre as a literary genre and a canonic European art form (Part II). In the first part I discuss the play-within-a-play as an early modern dramaturgical or narrative "device"—referred to as the "mousetrap" in *Hamlet* but used also by Thomas More in *Utopia* and by Shakespeare and other authors elsewhere—and its relation to the historical rise of the capitalist mode of production in late 16th and early 17th century England. In the second part I examine the transformations of this "device" in modern and contemporary dramaturgy and performance art—from Bertolt Brecht to Samuel Beckett to Hainer Müller to Laibach—in close relation to the historic disintegration of the Marxist-Communist alternative and the current world order, where the capitalist mode of production is never very far from the neoliberal dogma of TINA (There Is No Alternative).

Part I.

1. Play Within a Play

The play's the thing/Wherein I'll catch the conscience of the king. (WS, *Hamlet*)

In *Capital Vol. I* Karl Marx argued that the "prelude of the revolution that laid the foundation of the capitalist mode of production was played in the last third of the 15th, and the first decade of the 16th century."[3] In the latter half of the 16th century and into the beginning of the 17th century, when Shakespeare's *Hamlet* was written, the real drama of the rise of the capitalist mode of production began.[4] In those decades, not so long ago as marked by the impersonal clock of history, the Northern European renaissance produced a number of literary masterpieces that are still—as I will argue in continuation—relevant reference points for us today. Erasmus's *In Praise of Folly,* written during a course of intense dialogues with fellow philosopher Thomas More, appeared in 1511; More's own masterpiece, *Utopia,* was published just five years later, in 1516. *Utopia* in particular, praised as both a work of fiction and political philosophy, is structured as a radical inquiry into the relation between the fictional and the non-fictional (historical) realms. Consisting of two parts, *Utopia* offers the reader a glimpse of two separate scenes—books. In the first book the author presents, in documentary style, correspondence and dialogues between various figures of the Northern European political and literary establishment. All were real historical figures except one, Raphael Hythloday, who is the narrator of the second book in which he, just like More in the first book, offers a detailed description of life on the island of *Utopia,* which is located somewhere in the "New World".[5] When the discussion between the characters of *Utopia* touches upon the topic of "critique", More argues that direct critique of social affairs never really works, neither in politics nor in ordinary life. "You are not obliged to assault people with discourses that are out of their road, when you see that their received notions must prevent your making an impression upon them. You ought rather to cast about and to manage things with all the dexterity in your power".[6] In the

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[3] Karl Marx, *Capital Vol. I* (Kindle Edition: Aristeus Books, 2012), 12622-12623.

[4] *Hamlet* is the literary product of the *Fin de siècle*, written some time between 1599 and 1602.

[5] More again linked Raphale Hythloday's fictional travels with the real historic travels of Amerrigo Vespucci.

[6] Thomas More, *Utopia,* ed. Stephen Duncombe (Wivenhoe / New York / Port Watson: Minor Compositions, 2012), 71. This edition is part of the online project *Open Utopia* initiated by Stephen Duncombe and is also available at http://theopenutopia.org/home/ (website project licensed under Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 3.0 Unported License.

role of the real historic figure More offered some valuable meta-commentary on the political value of the narrative technique of the story-within-a-story, which he saw as the inter-play of two plays. This technique allowed More to introduce—in the words of his fictional character Hythlody—an idea so radical as to claim that private property lies at the root of all social problems, including crime—not an opinion many people have ever been terribly ready to accept, neither 500 years ago, when capitalism was about to take off, nor in the late capitalism of today).[7] *Utopia* is an engaging literary work that openly seduces the reader into considering the socio-political alternatives. In his astute analysis of *Utopia* in the introduction to his online-based project "Open Utopia"[8], Stephen Duncombe argues that More's tactical narration allowed the author to occupy a third position: "Instead of countering reality as the critic does, or accepting a reality already given like the courtier, this person creates their own reality. This individual—let us call them an artist—conjures up a full-blown life world that operates according to a different axiom."[9] In a further explanation of how such an axiom works Duncombe offers an analogy with the play-within-a-play scene in *Hamlet,* contending that: "Like Hamlet staging the murder of his father before an audience of the court and the eyes of his treacherous uncle, the artist maneuvers the spectator into a position where they see their world in a new light."[10] Instead of convincing others that what they know to be right is actually wrong—not unlike the fictionalized Socratic dialogue in the first book of *Utopia*—in the second book More expands the framework of reasoning by creating a scene that allows for an entirely new way of interpretation, and asks the reader or listener to experience it for themselves. Rather than just smartly negating his lived historic reality, More—in his day-job a politician who ended up losing his head for his politics—created a fiction-art of a wholly new kind.

The liminal dramaturgy choreographed by both More and Shakespeare in creating cunningly interplaying scenes, achieved a very particular historical embodiment in the fundamentally liminal (geographically, socially and politically) site of London's theatre scene of the late 16th and early 17th century. The Elizabethan theatre[11] emerged on the threshold of realities brought into play by the

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[7] More, *Utopia*, 74. ("Though, to speak plainly my real sentiments, I must freely own that as long as there is any property, and while money is the standard of all other things, I cannot think that a nation can be governed either justly or happily…")

[8] Stephen Duncombe, *Open Utopia* (http://theopenutopia.org/home/: website project licensed under Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 3.0 Unported License). Also at More, *Utopia*, xi- lxv.

[9] More, *Utopia*, xxviii.

[10] More, *Utopia,* xxviii.

[11] Early modern English theatre, or Elizabethan theatre, refers to the theatre of England between 1562 and 1642, when puritans banned the staging of plays in London's theatres for 18 years.

ideological division of the protestant revolution in England and by the redistri-
bution of wealth that came with it. The areas called "Liberties", such as Lon-
don's Bankside, where most of the theatres of the Elizabethan era were located,
were both part and not part of the city, but certainly represented a kind of twi-
light zone where the "uppers" and "lowers" of early modern society mixed in a
most conspicuous way.[12] The majority of people hanging around the Bankside
were the subjects of "forcible expropriation", which as Marx contends "received
in the 16th century a new and frightful impulse …"[13] Masses of people deprived
of their former mode of livelihood were turned into beggars, robbers, vagabonds
and would-be survivors of all sorts. During the whole of the 16th century legal
authorities responded to this new social condition with aggressive laws that pun-
ished vagabondage.[14] In the Liberties, however, laws against drifters were not
enforced, which allowed new forms of life to emerge. The vibrant Bankside sce-
ne thus became attractive not only for the growing class of paupers but also for
the wealthier and aristocratic classes who went there to satisfy their entertain-
ment needs, do business, or obtain valuable information.[15] In this social atmos-

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[12] In the 16th century people were emigrating en masse to London so the city outgrew its
old walls. Prior to the reformation, the Church owned most of the land outside the city
walls. During the Reformation the King appropriated this land and gave parcels to
courtiers who either became property developers themselves or sold it to developers.
This former Church-owned parcels were called 'Liberties" because they were located
outside the jurisdiction of city government laws, which were very unwelcoming for
actors, vagabonds and other similar "professions".

[13] Marx further wrote: "The Catholic church was, at the time of the Reformation, feudal
proprietor of a great part of the English land. The suppression of the monasteries &c.
hurled their inhabitants into the proletariat. The estates of the church were to a large
extent given away to rapacious royal favorites, or sold at a nominal price to speculating
farmers and citizens, who drove out, *en masse,* the hereditary sub-tenants and threw their
holdings into one. The legally guaranteed property of the poorer folk in a part of the
church's tithes was tacitly confiscated." Marx, *Capital Vol. I,* 12667-12669.

[14] Thus the "fathers of the present working class", said Marx, "were chastised for their
enforced transformation into vagabonds and paupers. Legislation treated them as
"voluntary" criminals, and assumed that it depended on their own good will to go on
working under the old conditions that no longer existed." Marx, *Capital Vol. I,* 12829-
12831.

[15] The entire play of Hamlet is permeated with the theme of conspiracy and spying. The
emerging protestant politicians (obviously motivated by strengthening control over
Catholic opposition) such as William Cecil (Baron Burghley), Elisabeth's chief adviser,
twice Secretary of State and Lord High Treasurer, and Francis Walsingham, Elisabeth's
principal secretary, are remembered as the executives of the first modern spy-network
and the inventors of the first well-organized secret service (like today's CIA, the former
KGB, the Stasi and others). It is known that they hired widely among the poor and
students and thus created a society where every citizen was a potential spy or being
spied on.

phere the Elizabethan theatre functioned as a play within a larger socio-political game, well reflecting the collective conscience of the emerging capitalist mode of production with its ongoing primitive accumulation as its—not yet properly hidden—underside.

In *Hamlet* specifically, Shakespeare captured this radically ideologically divided and collectively unjust historic constellation, both subjectively and analytically. As the dispossessed prince, Hamlet doesn't express his rage over his dispossession (the crown that was denied him by his uncle) directly but camouflages it in his, as he calls it "antic disposition", a particularly ambiguous and theatrical but also "roguish" (low class) behavior, behind which he hides his "true feelings".[16] And these feelings are the riddle that his co-players and the spies who chase him through the story, together with we the readers and the audience, would like to solve and have explained.

2. The Riddle of the Dream Within a Dream

The answers to two important questions—what did Hamlet (or better his creator) really feel in his dispossessed situation, who was he behind the mask of the "antic disposition"; and how are we to qualify the *pros* and *cons* of his artistic intervention and the disruption of the game dictated by the court of his time—are not of course offered up in the play itself, and have to be imagined and answered according to the reader or spectator's own historic material and experience.

In his approach to these same questions in his short yet influential mention of *Hamlet* in *The interpretation of Dreams* Sigmund Freud offered some valuable insights into reading and understanding the transhistoric impact of literary masterpieces by drawing a parallel between the act of creating works of art and dream-work. He used Hamlet's "antic disposition", interpreted by other *dramatis personas* of the play as his "madness", and the spymaster Polonius's "aside"— "Though this be madness, yet there is method in 't"[17]—as a simile to point up the cunningly hidden messages contained in seemingly absurd nightly dreams. The madness of dreams is, said Freud, "perhaps only a disguise, a dramatic pretence, like that of Hamlet".[18] The relationship between the waking ideation and dreams, where the psychological activity of the brain of a reasonable person is as

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[16] My argument that the social status that Hamlet occupies in the story—where he is positioned to play the role of a (dispossessed) prince—is sharply reversed in the structure of his character, which draws from the 16th century's lower and dispossessed class's behavioral and linguistic patterns, will be further explained in the following section of this essay.

[17] William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, ed. Harold Jenkins (London: Methuen, The Arden Shakespeare, 1982), Polonius (2.2), 248.

[18] Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams,* (Kindle Edition: Seven Treasures Publications, 2008), 34.

if it migrated into that of a madman) are in relation similar to that of the drama-turgy of the two plays in More's *Utopia*, or the mousetrap scene in *Hamlet*. Dreams take place, Freud suggested, in "another scene" (*eine andere Schauplatz*) that plays itself out according to a fundamentally different set of rules than that of waking, ideational life. Like dreams, artworks (occasionally referred to by Freud as "artificial dreams") comprise, condense, displace, distort, disguise and substitute residues of the poet's lived experience in order to fulfill a very con-crete task. And that is the task of compensation for the failure to fulfill the dreamer-poet's deepest and most unconscious wishes and desires, those that could not be realized in his or her actual waking life.

The conflict displayed in *Hamlet* most resembles a particular type of "typical dreams", in which the dreamer experiences the sensation of inhibited movement or frozen action. In such dreams running or screaming is experienced as a mat-ter of life or death but, to the ultimate horror of the dreamer, he/she cannot move his/her legs, cannot even utter a sound. These kinds of common dreams, says Freud, are the expression of "a will to which a counter-will is opposed. Thus the sensation of inhibited movement represents a conflict of will."[19] Could it then be a coincidence that these experiences of motoric paralysis during sleep ("closely allied to anxiety") often employ another cunning dramaturgical element invented by the unconscious genius of dreaming, that is "the riddle of a dream within a dream"?[20] According to Freud's thinking, the dream within a dream occurs when the internal forces of censorship prevent the dreaming subject from breaking through his "No" command and realizing his "wish fulfillment" through the fiction generated by the dream, therefore the recourse, the way back to the safety of the idea of a waking conscience (non-fictive reality) is the only way for the dream to fulfill its task. According to Freud's interpretation of dreams and its applicability to the interpretation of artworks, Shakespeare's hero Hamlet wriggled out of the dilemma of two conflicting commands (father's vs. uncle's; catholic vs. protestant) with an act of substituting the expected act of revenge with the creative act (theatre art/mousetrap) that he cast as a "compensatory" solution to the unbearable repression that inhibited his action in the "manifest" content of the play. Just as in dreams "manifest" and "latent" content is ex-pressed in the unconscious, usually as visual dream-thoughts (which need to be translated to waking forms of consciousness through the act of interpretation), so the story of prince Hamlet's vicious encounters with the corruption of politi-cal power thinks itself through the medium of theatre. In so doing, the theatre of *Hamlet* is not a mere medium or platform for telling the story of Hamlet and the political intrigues of his time, but theatre itself becomes the subject of inquiry.

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[19] Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, 182-183.
[20] Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, 183.

The play is then more a chase to identify theatre as the omnipresent apparatus[21] of authority and as such, a medium integrally involved in, driving the way our stories and our histories ultimately develop.

3. The Theatre/Authority Apparatus and its Conscience

Hamlet is an old play about contemporary angst[22], channeled from Shakespeare's 16th century body—*via* the literalized dream of a play—straight to our contemporary living selves. The reason we still think about, contemplate the riddle of Hamlet (though less read or watch the play itself) is that we still inhabit the space of the insurmountable conflict captured in this play.

There are two fascinating things about this conflict and how Shakespeare articulated it. The first is that the core of *Hamlet's* story is not constituted by the hero's conflict with the King's authority as such, but that this authority obscures a presumed yet inexplicit crime, and that the entire social apparatus is organized to maintain, protect the moral ambiguity of the new court.[23] Whether friendship

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[21] I refer to the concept of the "apparatus" as it is proposed and explained from various angles by the major thinkers of the so-called post-structuralist theory (Jacques Lacan, Louis Althuser, Michel Foucalult, Gilles Deleuze, Felix Guattari and others). It is the apparatus of the state or legal authority that organizes most basic social practices. I emphasize the inherent theatricality of the apparatus because its efficiency depends on the organization of viewing – a politics of spectatorship. The fact that Shakespeare called his counter-apparatus – designed to counteract the apparatus of the state – mousetrap is of course in and of itself meaningful in the context of this essay.

[22] Angst is the word the English language adopted from Danish, Norwegian, Dutch and German, and stands for anxiety and fear. The visual equivalent to a silenced, infinite scream I argue is expressed in *Hamlet* is Edward Munch's 1893 painting *The Scream*.

[23] In the *dramatis personae* of *Hamlet* the reader can decode condensations, inversions and substitutions of various historic figures and events. The "Virgin Queen" (Elisabeth I.) —reversed into the promiscuous but rather naïve Gertrude—was in her time surrounded by two pioneering statesman of the English protestant state and well-known Machiavellians – William Cecil, (Baron Burghley) and Robert Dudley (Earl of Leicester), whose policies were backed by spymaster Francis Walsingham. The trio could be seen condensed into the duo of Claudius and Polonius. The conflict between the Ghost-Father and the King-Uncle bears a clear processual resemblance to the real historic separation of the English Church into the contested "old" (Catholic) and "new" enforced (Protestant) fate. There is also a theme of generational transfer. By the end of the 16th century the Queen and her generation came of age and the question of succession was clearly in the air. The Queen had no children but her "New-Men" had sons. Baron Burghley's son Robert Cecil took over the functions of his father and the deceased Walsingham and thus became an heir in political terms, and a successor of the so-called *regnum Cecilianum* that defined a certain style of governance then typical of the English state and still today. Robert Dudley—who was at the time a serious candidate for the position of the Queen's husband (also called her "favorite") had a stepson, Robert Devereux (2nd

or love, all human relationships are sooner or later corrupted as a result of the overwhelming conspiracy organized around protecting the governing will.[24] But let's now shift our imagination from the affairs of an imaginary court to the affairs of (historic) people.

It is hard to imagine that people did not share our sense of moral (in)justice in terms of what was going on during the 15th and 16th century, when the peasantry was forcibly driven off their land and most common land was usurped by a privileged few. Nevertheless, the common people had no means by which to express their disapproval, because the entire enterprise (in violation of the old yet still largely binding legal system) came with the explicit authority of the king or queen, together with parliament. These instances of governance were dedicated to enforcing the new economic and financial laws (produce the new elites and revenues) in parallel with enforcing the new protestant destiny. In other words, the authority of the law gradually normalized the unjust nature of this massive dispossession, affecting not only the peasantry at large but all Catholic opposition as well. Hence, I would argue that the sense of or atmosphere surrounding this gross social injustice and loss is manifested in Shakespeare's *Hamlet,* and one of the ways through which this mood surfaces in the play is precisely *via* the artful use of theatre — i.e. the reverting mechanism of the mousetrap.

Earl of Essex), who became the old Queen's new "favorite". At the beginning of 1601 Essex plotted a rebellion against the "Queen's" regime, demanding changes in the government (particularly curtailing the power and influence of Robert Cecil). In preparation for the revolt his supporters asked Shakespeare's theatre company *Lord Chamberlain's Men* to perform *Richard III* (with the deposition scene) on the eve before the rebellion, February 7, 1601. The rebellion failed and as a result, Essex was beheaded two weeks later. Essex's character and his use of theatre play with the purpose of intervening in current political affairs was not, however, the only suitable historical source behind Shakespeare's fictionalization of Hamlet and his mousetrap. In 1593, Robert Cecil's people arrested two of Shakespeare's colleagues and rivals, Thomas Kyd and Christopher Marlowe, over their suspicious activities and presumed involvement in anti-state activity. Marlowe was soon released but brutally murdered immediately afterward in a "staged" fight. Kyd was imprisoned and died due to injuries sustained during torture in 1594. Marlowe, who was, as some historic documents reveal, recruited into Burghley spy service already in his student years, but who later as playwright, acted subversively against the so-called *regnum Cicilianum*, was, as many historians and interpretations of *Hamlet* hold, another possible source of inspiration for the hero's and Laertes's characters. His plays, *The Massacre at Paris*, and *Edward II.*, first performed in the early 1590s, were known for their provocative political and sexual content.

[24]Polonius, for example, used his daughter Ophelia's love as spy-bait against her knowledge. He also spies on his own son Laertes. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, recruited into Polonius's police service, were once school friends of the hero but show no hesitation in executing him after they have received such order from above.

Let me expound by shifting the gaze back to the play. In Shakespeare's England a younger's brother marriage to an elder brother's widow was considered immoral and against the law if the elder brother left a surviving son. Applied to *Hamlet*, the only way of legally justifying the marriage between Gertrude and Claudius was to consider Hamlet dead. If Hamlet's rights were thwarted or violated according to the existing law (known to the audiences of the time), the question remains how and why everybody (except Horatio) in the play is directed in such a way as to participate in chasing Hamlet like as if in a nightmare. Why is the injustice of dispossession neutralized, or rendered as madness? And yet, this sensation or experience is not so unfamiliar to us, living as we are through the turn of the millennium and witnessing perhaps the most extreme return to mass redistribution of wealth through dispossession since the 16th century, this time on a global scale. We feel the Hamlet-like angst, one with a movement or indeed a voice, and which continues to resist discussion as intelligible interpretation and most of all, viable political action.

The question is, can we still claim and lay claim to art as an agency capable of cutting through the nightmarish dreams and instead staging a world of conscious and comforting reality? Does the mousetrap counter-mechanism still work as an artistic strategy in these times? This question addresses the second fascinating feature of the play under examination. Though it may seem coincidental, it is fascinating that Shakespeare inscribed in *Hamlet* a sort of *A Short Organum for the Theatre*[25], which later in the 20th century became the entry line for another master mousetraper's—Bertolt Brecht—arrival on the stage of history. The "north-northwest"[26] mad Hamlet epitomizes the idea of Brecht's *Gestus*[27],

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[25] *A Short Organum for the Theatre* is a theoretical work by the German dramaturge and director of Marxist provenance, Bertolt Brecht. It was first published in 1949. In the introduction to some later editions Brecht identified this work as a "description of a theatre of the scientific age".

[26] This is how Hamlet, indicating he has his acting under control (that the actor can observe and reflect on the character he plays), comments on the common assumption of Hamlet's madness: "I am but mad north–north-west. When the wind is southerly, I know a hawk from a handsaw". Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, (2.2.) Hamlet, 375

[27] Beside the "alienation effect" (*Verfremdungseffekt*), *Gestus* is the most important concept of Bertolt Brecht's theoretical vision of epic theatre, about which he wrote in the essay "On Gestic Music" (1937/38) and *A Short Organum for the Theatre* (1947). The concept represents an elusive mix of meanings, as it brings into focus precisely those aspects of the performative character of life and history in which the social (historical) structures meet and touch the personal structures—i.e. the subject's experiences and responses to the impersonal social configurations that mold them. In the ongoing play of history personal elements—attitudes, emotions, wishes, convictions etc.—became actively engaged with the ideological and hierarchical contents (script) of our socially-conditioned consciousness. And precisely this friction of the social and the personal is that which shapes our social behavior—just as the unconscious language of dreams is shaped through dis-

both as character in the play and as self-appointed theatre director (of the mousetrap). His "antic disposition" is an almost permanent spasm (affect, *Gestus*) created through the conflict of the character's personal attitude (his truth seeking) and the internal censorship protecting him from transgressing the deadly rules of the social play in which he is obliged to play his part (his emotional response to being hunted). In the soliloquy in which Hamlet plots the mousetrap scene he not only perfectly describes the apparatus of theatre but also offers one of the most concise definitions of performativity, as follows:

> *......I have heard*
> *That guilty creatures sitting at a play*
> *Have, by the very cunning of the scene,*
> *Been struck so to the soul that presently*
> *They have proclaimed their malefactions.*
> *For murder, though it have no tongue, will speak*
> *With most miraculous organ.*[28]

While Hamlet describes the mechanism of identification almost to the letter as Aristotle described it in the 4th century BC in *Poetics*, he consciously redesigns its purpose. His mousetrap is not designed for spectators to experience a *catharsis* and purge, purify themselves of pity and fear in order to set these emotions back in balance. It is designed to cast doubt on the spectator's perceptions (of the governing authority by an attempt to expose its conscience). In other words, it is designed to generate a perceptual "effect" that was theoretically elaborated in the 20th century in various complementary concepts such as "estrangement", "defamiliarization", "alienation effect" and similar.[29]

Hamlet directs an old play and changes only a few accents in it:

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tortions (the dramaturgical figures of dreams) that the wishes of the dreamers create when they try to avoid or override the superego's "No" command.

[28] Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, (2.2.) Hamlet, 272.

[29] Brecht's theory of *Verfremdungseffekt* (translated into English as "alienation", "distancing" "estrangement effect) and his theory of *Gestus* (footnote #19) are related. Brecht adopted it from Viktor Shklowsky's concept of estrangement (*ostranieneie)* that he developed in his 1925 essay "Art and Technique", in which he claimed that human perception has the tendency to become habitual, automated, and thus the role of art is to make the familiar seem and be experienced as strange. He first used this term in the essay "Alienation Effects in Chinese Acting", published in 1936, in which he described it as "playing in such a way that the audience was hindered from simply identifying itself with the characters in the play". In his theory and practice this strategy become adopted as the underlying method that defined acting, directing, treatment of the audience, and the overall effect of his theatre.

I'll have these players
Play something like the murder of my father
Before mine uncle. I'll observe his looks.
I'll tent him to the quick. If he do blench,
I know my course. The spirit that I have seen
May be the devil, and the devil hath power
T' assume a pleasing shape. Yea, and perhaps
Out of my weakness and my melancholy,
As he is very potent with such spirits,
Abuses me to damn me. I'll have grounds
More relative than this. The play's the thing
Wherein I'll catch the conscience of the king.[30]

The question just what conscience got caught in Hamlet's mousetrap remains open. When the "cunning scene" of the murder is played out, Claudius demands "Lights!" (on himself), which technically speaking creates the reversal between stage and auditorium, the sphere of the fictional and the non-fictional, and the beholder and the beheld; and which steers our attention from the story and identification to the auditorium and interpretation.

Brecht's modernist and Marxist conception of epic theatre drew precisely from this meta-theatrical aspect of Shakespeare's dramaturgy. Brecht saw theater as a device, or a sort of site of conversion, close to Freud's "other scene". The "other scene" of dreams needs to be interpreted in the framework of the rational laws of waking consciousness in order to help the dreaming subject gain better command over his/her unconscious. Brecht's "other scene" of theatre is, on the other hand, a place where the unconscious, dreamlike play of history becomes entrapped in order to be scrutinized and methodically interpreted in a joint act of theater-making and theater-viewing. The goal again is to get the unconscious play of history under the control of those who constitute the material of history. It is a question of the dilemma between playing our parts in history and being played by an invisible player. In the last sequences of the hunt for Hamlet's head triggered by mousetrap scene Hamlet expresses something quintessential that, until recently, definitively belonged to the *ethos* of the modern artist.

You would pluck out the heart of my mystery. You would sound me from my lowest note to the top of my compass. And there is much music, excellent voice, in this little organ, yet cannot you make it speak? 'Sblood, do you think I am easier to be played on than a pipe? Call me what instrument you will, though you can fret me, yet you cannot play upon me.[31]

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[30] Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, (2.2.), Hamlet, 273.
[31] Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, (3.2.), Hamlet, 309.

In the second part of this essay I offer some glimpses into selected scenes that show how the politically-realized modern alternative to the capitalist mode of production deconstructed itself in parallel with the process of the dematerialization of the art-object that was constructed throughout the modern era (with literature and theatre as my main focus). The dismantling of the real socialist states in Eastern Europe in 1989 paved the way to a situation wherein (in the words of the author of *The Open Utopia*):

> *… by and large the only game in town is the global free market. In itself this might not be so bad, except for the increasingly obvious fact that the system is not working, not for most people and not most of the time. Income inequality has increased dramatically both between and within nations. National autonomy has become subservient to the imperatives of global economic institutions, and federal, state, and local governance are undermined by the protected power of money. Profit-driven industrialization and the headlong rush toward universal consumerism is hastening the ecological destruction of the planet. In short: the world is a mess." Opinion polls, street protests, and volatile voting patterns demonstrate widespread dissatisfaction with the current system, but the popular response so far has largely been limited to the angry outcry of No! No to dictators, No to corruption, No to finance capital, No to the one percent who control everything. But negation, by itself, affects nothing. The dominant system dominates not because people agree with it; it rules because we are convinced there is no alternative.*[32]

Part II.

1. "I was Hamlet" — Family Album

I was Hamlet. I stood on the coast and spoke with the surf BLABLA at my back the ruins of Europe. (H M, *Hamlet-Machine*)

Heiner Müller's lifelong obsession with Shakespeare's *Hamlet* began when he first read the play at age thirteen. Indeed, as Lacan argued, the play functions as a "birdcatcher's net"[33] a trap that reveals more about the reader and his or her

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[32] More, *Utopia* Duncombe, x.

[33] In his seminar VI. "Desire and Its Interpretation" (1958/59) Jacques Lacan dedicated seven lectures to the problematics of *Hamlet*. The transcript was first published in the French journal *Ornicar?* 24/1981,25/1982, 26-27/1983. I'm quoting from Cormac Gallagher's translation available online at http://esource.dbs.ie/handle/10788/157 (2011-08-17,178). See the whole sentence: *It is because this place is exceptionally well articulated here, so well I would say and in such a fashion that each and every person finds his own place in it, can recognise himself in it, that the machinery, the net of the play Hamlet is this kind of network, a "birdcatchers"net in which the desire of man is essentially articulated here, in terms precisely of the*

time than the play's protagonist, who is considered un-interpretable.[34] Over the course of modernity, many 'geniuses' that desired to be free as a bird and simultaneously lives in a perfectly organized world well recognized their own predicaments in Hamlet. As much as it was a story about a character in a play written by Shakespeare, it was a story about them.[35] By mapping the enigmatic 'thing' without ever being able to fully grasp it in the form of enunciation, *Hamlet* become a repository of modern subjectivity—a subjectivity that had been shaped through the struggle to reconcile the conflict between authority, desire and the share of guilt for deeds belonging to the darkest sides of modernity.[36]

Müller wrote the first words of what would become an unusual play called *Hamletmachine*[37] in 1956—a critical year in European history. (In February 1956 Khruschev revealed the full scope of Stalin's reign of terror; Berthold Brecht,

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coordinates that Freud uncovers for us, namely its relationship to the Oedipus complex and to castration.

[34]Müller's frequently quoted statement offers that Hamlet is "much more a German character than English … the intellectual in conflict with history." Heiner Müller, *Hamlet*-Machine, transl. & ed. by Carl Weber (Baltimore & New York: John Hopkins University Press & PAJ Books, 1984), 50.

[35] To name but a few: Henry Mackenzie (1780), J. W. von Goethe (1795), S. T. Coleridge (1808), K. W. F. Schlegel (1809), Sigmund Freud (1913), T. S. Eliot (1921) Ernest Jones (1949), Carl Schmitt (1956), Heiner Müller (1956/78), Jacques Lacan (1958/59), Margareta de Grazia (2007).

[36] In his lecture "Shakespeare a Difference", Müller articulated an idea similar to that of Lacan's metaphor of the "birdcatchers net," asserting that the invasion of the times into the play constitutes a myth, which is an "aggregate, a machine to which always new and different machines can be connected." Carl Weber, ed. & trans., *A Heiner Muller Reader* (Baltimore & London: John Hopkins University Press & PAJ Books, 2001), 120.

[37] The structural and comparative analysis of both plays (*Hamlet* and *HamletMachine*) would constitute a subject for a whole new essay. Hamlet was, at the time of its conception, an unusual play. Margareta de Grazia draws an observant analogy between Hamlet's dispossession (according to the plot) and his character's detachment from the plot/story (equivalent to the land that Shakespeare appropriated from the older versions of the play—*Ur-Hamlet*). The plot/story in *Hamlet* is, says de Grazia " inert backdrop to the main character who can readily leave it behind to wander into other and later works, no strings attached." [Margareta de Grazia, *Hamlet Without Hamlet* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 8] In later centuries we find it in different countries, stories and plays (as Vladimir and Estragon, King Ubu—to name but a few). His managing to avoid participating in the story is formally articulated in such a way that the hero's soliloquies literally eclipse the action of the play. The story and the hero belong to two different scenes. In Müller's *HamletMachine* all that is left is the soliloquy—the story, the land is gone. Structurally, Müller's short soliloquy called *Hamletmachine* far closer resembles a dream hastily written down in the morning (that according to Freud allows indeterminate number of interpretations) than it does a dramatic text in the traditional sense of the word.

who most elaborately employed the mousetrap stratagem in his dramaturgy, died on August 14th, 1956; three days later, the Communist Party of Germany was banned in the Federal Republic of Germany; in October, efforts to reform the Communist system in Hungary escalated into a revolution that was crushed by Soviet forces after a weeklong civil war.) Müller spent more than 20 years working on this text of just a few pages, which, along with his other 'plays', represents the end-point of drama and theatre as we knew it (but also the beginning of something else).[38] In his writings, Müller frequently evoked tropes of 'the end'. In the poem *Theaterdeath*, from the late 1990s, he portrayed theatre as a "dying man who now resembles none but himself."[39] Elsewhere, Müller announced that he was looking for a new approach to writing because "the historical substance has been used up for me from the vantage point I tried to employ while writing about it … The author can't ignore himself anymore. … If I don't talk about myself I reach no one anymore". [40]

The first scene of *Hamletmachine*, called "Family Album," begins with the actor (portraying Hamlet) saying: "I was Hamlet. I stood at the shore and talked with the surf BLABLA, the ruins of Europe in back of me."[41] As the play unfolds, two photographs are torn apart. In the second scene ("Europe of Women") Ophelia announces: "With my bleeding hands I tear the photo of the men I loved and who used me on the bed on the table on the chair on the ground." In the final scene ("Pest in Buda/Battle for Greenland") the script calls for The Actor Playing Hamlet to deliver the final monologue while "Tearing the author's photograph". The actor then concludes the ritual, saying:

> *I force open my sealed flesh. I want to dwell in my veins, in the marrow of my*
> *bones, in the maze of my skull. I retreat into my entrails. Take my seat in my*
> *shit, in my blood. Somewhere bodies are torn apart so I can dwell in my shit.*
> *Somewhere bodies are opened so I can be alone with my blood. My thoughts are*

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[38] Müller's and Beckett's 'end-plays' represent two different sides of the Janus face: one facing the frontiers of modernism, the other dissolving in an open-ended post-modernist virtuality. The most significant difference between Beckett's and Müller's 'ends' of drama and theatre is their different treatment of the relation between literature and theatre. Beckett insisted on staging his texts strictly according to his instructions (didaskalia). He authorized his agents to prosecute directors and theatres that disobeyed his rules. Müller's plays are not, on the other hand, structured as dialogical any more, but as endless monologues (repositories of quotes) scripting the idea; an algorithm to stimulate the performance to happen (differently with each new translation of words into actions and images).

[39] Weber. *Reader*, 2001, 236

[40] Heiner Müller, *Hamletmachine and other texts for stage*, ed. & tran. Carl Weber (New York: PAJ Books, 1984) 16

[41] Müller, *Hamletmachine*, 1984, 53 (In this edition the title of the first scene is translated as "Family Scrapbook").

lesions in my brain. My brain is a scar. I want to be a machine. Arms for grabbing Legs to walk on, no pain no thoughts.[42]

2. My Family Album

We are all born into a continuous, ongoing play called history, and it falls to each of us to (mis)recognize what transpired in the previous scenes so that we can take up our roles and decide how to act in the coming ones.

fig. 1: Silvester Čufer in the uniform of the Yugoslav
police officer, 1960 (from family album)

My father lived his life as a story that comprises all of the key elements of a narrative written by the "absent cause" of Modernity: of international proletarian origins, the experience of war, the sweet promise of a better, more equitable life in a society organized according to the rules of socialism; and a happy and successful life lived in such a society—which broke down just two decades before he passed away in 2010. Silvester Čufer was born in 1936 in a small Belgian indus-

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[42] Müller, *Hamletmachine,* 1984, 57.

trial and mining town, where his Slovenian parents had migrated for work. In 1940, after Hitler attacked Belgium, the family was repatriated to the territory that today lies within Slovenia—territory that was then under Italian occupation. During the war, the family first lived in an abandoned hotel, but in 1943, when the German army destroyed the hotel, my grandparents and their three children became refugees, moving from place to place, from one barn to the next. After the war ended, my father finished primary school and got a job in an ironworks in the heavy industry town of Jesenice. A decade or so later, in 1958, he was given the opportunity to enroll in secondary school. Immediately following graduation he was invited to join the police force of the Republic of Slovenia, part of the new post-WWII state of the Socialist Federalist Republic of Yugoslavia. The choice to become a policeman turned out to be a very good one for my father. He believed strongly in socialism and the superiority of the new socialist state over the former organizational structures and traditions dominated by the church and the wealthier classes. The new socialist state of Yugoslavia *de facto* blossomed into a successful project during the 1960s and 1970s, offering its citizens a previously unimaginable prosperity and opportunities.

fig. 2: Čufer family with the portrait of the Yugoslav president Tito in the background (from left to right; Miroslava, Eda, Silvester) in 1961 (from family album)

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By 1965 my father had a wife, a daughter, a car, and a TV. One of my first concrete memories as a child is the excitement that came with the moment a TV screen first lit up our household. I remember my father carrying the box into our house after work one day, explaining to my mother and I that he had bought it after seeing the first televised images of the moon through the window of a small local appliance store. That was March 24, 1965, when NASA's *Ranger 9* landed on the Moon in the *Alphonsus Crater* and transmitted the first pictures of the moon, seen live on TV only minutes before its (planned) crash landing.

3. *Laibach*-Machine

The socialist reality so passionately fought for and won by our fathers was very good to them. This same reality felt very different to me and my — the second but also the last — socialist generation. My experience of the *Laibach* concert, at Ljubljana's Križanke in 1982 (where, as I mentioned in the introduction, I recognized the mousetrap at work within my own world of late Yugoslav socialism) was also an opportunity to consciously confront the unconscious anxiety of my generation. I saw *Laibach*'s frontman impersonating the late fascist leader Benito Mussolini reading our (Slovene) constitution. He spoke about our — the peoples — rights, but he did so as if those rights were our sins, our unforgivable guilt, not the rights that would sustain and empower us. As I stood in the crowd, watching the concert, I experienced a sense of acute anxiety. The conflict between the message (the freedoms granted and embodied in the words of the constitution) and its enactment (in that authoritative voice and militaristic demeanor) opened up a gap, a split, between what I was hearing and seeing and what I was understanding and contemplating as my social truth. The text that granted me rights was suddenly materialized in a voice that commanded, dictated my social behavior so that I could experience and contemplate on the involuntary, puppet-like movements within myself — and coming into collision with the desired ones.

The concert in Križanke in the fall of 1982 was, however, only a prelude to another more memorable event. Less than a year later I watched the evening news and saw a stunning image on the TV screen: *Laibach* members were sitting, in full military uniform, in a stage-designed environment, ready to give an interview to the then popular TV host Jurij Pengov. As I watched this scene unfold I had a sudden (this time conscious) insight into the mechanisms captured in Shakespeare's *mousetrap* (which had been the subject of the theatre academy classes I was attending at the time). What shocked me most was the extent to which the event I was watching had been staged — its bold theatricality. Only later did I learn that *Laibach* had accepted the invitation to be interviewed for Slovenian National TV subject to certain conditions: that the interview be filmed in a specific exhibition space (within *Laibach*'s own installation in the ŠKUC gal-

lery, Ljubljana); and that they would receive the journalist's questions in advance. In setting these conditions, *Laibach* refused any element of spontaneity or interaction that would have been standard for any TV interview. What we eventually saw on TV that evening in 1983 was *Laibach*'s lead-voice sitting among his colleague-friends, reading their prepared answers to the questions like a programmed robot, while the other members of *Laibach* posed in silence as if frozen in an old looped photograph.

fig. 3: Tomaž Hostnik, (Laibach's frontman) bleeding after he got hit with the beer bottle arriving from the audience at *Novi Rock* concert, Ljubljana, 1982.

In its postmodern rendition, *Laibach* inserted its little "disturbing scene" within not the action of another play, but within the protocol that would define the postmodern tele-communicative era. When the journalist asked them: "Can you tell us anything about yourselves? For instance, who are you, what are your professional occupations, how old you are? Are you all here or are there more of you?," their reply came in the form of a verse:

We are the children of the spirit and the brothers of strength,
Whose promises are unfulfilled.

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We are the black phantoms of this world,
We sing the mad image of woe.
We are the first TV generation.[43]

fig. 4: Laibach, filming the interview for Slovenian national television
program *Teдnik* (Weekly) in ŠKUC Gallery, Ljubljana 1983

Laibach's urge to challenge the power of TV as medium underlined the entire interview. When the host provocatively asked: "So far you have been spreading your ideology, your ideological provocation in writing. Was your decision to acquaint some 600,000 to 700,000 members of the public with your ideology by appearing on TV in any way difficult?," Laibach answered as if declaiming straight from a neo-Marxist manual:

Apart from the educational system, television has the leading role in the formation of uniform opinions. The medium is centralized, with one 'transmitter' and a number of 'receivers', while communication between these is impossible. Being aware of the manipulative capacities the media possess, Laibach is exploiting

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[43] See APOLOGIA LAIBACH at http://www.laibach.org/manifests/.

> *the repressive power of media information. In the present case, it is the TV screen.*[44]

The entire operation was conducted with great precision, leading to the 'mousetrappian' tactical reversal of the viewing perspective. Just as the king in *Hamlet*, after seeing his own doings, suddenly commands everyone's attention by screaming for the lights, so did we (those of us watching the *Laibach* interview at home) produce a scream that reverberated for years after the event—one which took the form of theatre-without-theatre and *Hamlet*-without-*Hamlet*).[45] We had been mousetrapped, between the conscious, internal image of our present behavior (sitting still and watching TV) and the reflection of that behavior disturbingly repeated, mimicked on the screen.

4. Anti-heroes of Dystopia

In late 1989 the British literary magazine *Granta* published a special issue entitled *The State of Europe: Christmas Eve, 1989*, in which leading intellectuals from various public spheres and academic disciplines were asked to discuss the fall of the 'East'—its puzzling historic unpredictability and its consequences for the future of the world. The most intriguing contribution, which has not been taken up in subsequent accounts of the fall of real socialism in Europe in 1989, proved to be Hans Magnus Enzensberger's meditation on the historic appearance of a new type of hero—a hero of dismantling, deconstruction and retreat.[46] This hero—very different from the larger-than-life heroic characters of centuries past marked by the rise of the West, appeared around the same time Beckett's anti-heroes (e.g. Vladimir and Estragon) appeared in literature and theatre. Beginning with Soviet president Nikita Khrushchev, who condemned Stalinism and began "the deconstruction of the Soviet Empire", this new paradigm was particularly apparent in the deconstruction of the ferocious dictators of the 20th century. In Hungarian president János Kádár, Spanish prime minister Adolfo Suarez (Spain's first democratically elected leader following the Franco dictatorship), Polish leader Wojciech Jaruzelski, and Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev, we can observe the often largely undetectable dual role that certain figures played in simultaneously undermining and dismantling the absolute dictatorship of the party while at the same time also representing and acting in the name of it. With the distance of retrospect we can now see that the fall of the 'East' was a historically unique phenomenon. Rather than victory, it produced a profound historic anticlimax. Indeed the world witnessed a kind of historic anti-play of Shakespearean proportions as they watched the leaders of real socialism withdraw from untenable positions, and former totalitarian icons departing the

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[44]See XY – UNSOLVED at http://www.laibach.org/manifests/.

[45] *Hamlet* Without *Hamlet* is the title of a book by Magareta de Grazia, 2007).

[46] Hans Magnus Enzensberger, (No title.) *Granta* 30 (1990): 136-142.

stage as vulnerable, even tragic human beings. Referring to Clausewitz, who considered retreat the most difficult of all military operations, Enzensberger rightly concluded: "Retreating from the position you have held involves not only surrendering the middle ground, but also giving up a part of yourself. Such a move cannot succeed without a separation of character and role".[47] In one's own fiction everybody wants to be a winner, while in order to embrace retreat one needs to weigh the rights and wrongs of the factual acts and actual facts.

5. Postmodern Theatre-Without-Theatre

Once again the "other scene" of art played out as a drama before it became a common fact of existence. Writing on the decline of literature in the 1960s and 1970s, Hainer Müller argued that writers could no longer come to grips with the macro-structures (of society); therefore, from now on "the problem is the micro-structure."[48] His comments found an epochal equivalent in the theory and practice of the Situationists and their most reverberating charge—that contemporary society was becoming a "society of the spectacle" where "life is presented as an immense accumulation of *spectacles* …" and "everything that was directly lived has receded into a representation."[49] Or in Andy Warhol's *Factory*, which inspired the final words of *Hamletmachine*: "I want to be a machine".[50] Müller understood that within spectacularized post-industrial society, theatre (separated in its own social, spatial and temporal frames) lost its power to produce meaning (and consequently its access to the hearts and minds of the audience). Yet most of Müller's plays were and still are staged in the standard theatre boxes proudly maintained by numerous theatre institutions across Europe. Yet in their TV interview *Laibach* on the other hand inserted their theatre into the vortex of the larger social spectacle, within the protocols of one of the most powerful modern and contemporary codifiers of reality—the TV network. In their performance, *Laibach* enacted the final words of Muller's *Hamletmachine*—"I want to be a machine"—but delivered the message as an image, distributed from within the ongoing, real-time play enacted by and as a TV broadcast. As such, *Laibach's* intervention not only reflected the image of an automated, bureaucratic, depersonal-

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[47] Enzensberger, *Granta*, 1990, 137.

[48] Müller, *Hamletmachine,* 1984, 16.

[49] Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle* (Eastbourne: Soul Bay Press), Kindle Edition, 412.

[50] "I want to be a machine" is a statement by Andy Warhol ("The reason I'm painting this way is because I want to be a machine. Whatever I do, and do machine-like, is because it is what I want to do.") According to Müller's own reading, the title of the play refers to Warhol's mechanized art factory and to Duchamp's "Bachelor-Machine", giving *Hamlet*Machine the initials H.M. = Heiner Muller. See Jonathan Kalb, The *Theater of Hainer Müller* (Milwaukee: Hal Leonard's Limelight Editions, 2001), 107.

ized and empty society, but also taught us (viewers) a little lesson about how such a society is created, and by whom.

Television, which brought the simulacrum of theatre into people's living rooms, became a "game changer" during the Cold War. The Space Race between the USA and the USSR that brought the first TV set into my family's living room had already become quite irrelevant by the 1970s, by which time it was already evident that not the rockets but television would be the victorious vehicle of the imperialist wars of the future. A little over a decade later, *Laibach's* TV appearance/performance succeeded in producing a scandal—the goal of every good 'mousetrapper'. That evening people were screaming "Lights! Lights!"—and they were screaming for different reasons. There were many fellow Slovenians and Yugoslavians watching *Laibach* that evening—many who, like my father, grew up during WWII, and genuinely liked the world they had created out of resistance to Mussolini, Hitler and other dreadful, yet-to-be imagined demons that *Laibach* quite matter of factly introduced back onto center-stage.

Both Müller's and Laibach's cunning scenes still functioned within the safe realms of Jean-François Lyotard hypothesis of "the postmodern condition," marked by the "death of the master narrative" that was, as Duncombe put it, "once merely an academic hypothesis pondered by an intellectual elite".[51] After the official end of the last modernist master narrative in 1989 and the rise of the age of the Internet, the postmodern condition became a new political reality and the lived experience of the global multitudes.

Epilog (1989, 2001)

Significant structures and borders established within the unfolding of modernity (from the 16th century on) had irreversibly collapsed by the end of the 20th century. "Art and totalitarianism are not anymore mutually exclusive,"[52] said *Laibach* in its manifesto of 1980. Likewise, the King's guilt and the hero's desire, politics and art, are now as inseparable and interchangeable as auditorium and stage. In the last 30 years, so much has been said about the inevitable deaths (of author, god, subject, literature, painting, theatre, history, society, politics, etc.) that this important issue itself has become a *cliché*. The generation to which both Müller and my father belonged—which experienced fascism, Nazism, and the sweet promise of socialism and communism—contemplated 'death' according to different moral scales than mine, "the first TV generation"[53], for whom death, both real and fictionalized, was from the outset presented through one and the same mode of (virtualized) experience. The dematerialization of the object of art,

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[51] More, *Utopia* Duncombe, xiv.

[52] See STATEMENTS at http://www.laibach.org/manifests/.

[53] In the TV interview XY – UNSOLVED available http://www.laibach.org/manifests/, Laibach said: "We are the first TV generation."

which was institutionalized some time during the Cold War, coincided with the mass media take-over of industrialized cultures at large, turning societies themselves into living objects that generate themselves according to one type of social algorithm or another, until they ultimately reach their limit and miserably, collapse.

Müller is in some way right when he qualifies Shakespeare's *Hamlet* as "an attempt to describe an experience that has no reality in the time of its description. An end game at the dawn of an unknown day."[54] Contrary to his deconstructive and dystopic thinking, he also seems to also have believed in the existence of a world that Shakespeare's mirror would no longer be able to reflect: "We haven't arrived at ourselves as long as Shakespeare is writing our plays."[55] Developments in art and politics after 1989 have revealed, however, that the world can perhaps survive without Hamlet (hero and author), survive even without theatre (art). But there will always be the 'mousetrap,' as the mousetrap is precisely that meta-generative mechanism (effective in art as in politics/life) that has the power to both create and destroy peoples' realities *ad infinitum*. Like the Trojan Horse, "mousetrap" is a stratagem that can be used in art or war, depending which side of its two-faced character are we exposed to. The Cold War (and the crucial role of the mass media in supporting this new form of inverted psychological/moral warfare) turned social realities into a permanent swindle, a deception in the service of "higher' (state, market, corporate etc.) interests. As a stratagem, mousetrap remains a familiar feature of post-1989 and post-2001 military and artistic strategies, into which entirely new levels and intensities of mimicry and deception were introduced—not to mention new levels of blending borders, between territories and their inhabitants, between the imaginary and the real, authentic and fake, and between the capacity for truth and the necessity of the lie. German composer Karlheniz Stockhausen was widely criticized for his un-self-censored comments on the 9/11 terrorist attack on New York's World Trade Center in an interview talking about the new section of his opera *Licht* (*Light*, a work in progress, 1977-2003). Asked whether the figures in his opera represented real historic figures or just material instances of abstract ideas, he answered that there is no difference, as abstract ideas always inhabit real historic people. To support his point he sited the example of Lucifer (a cosmic spirit of rebellion, anarchy and destruction who is incapable of love), who had just completed the "biggest work of art there has ever been," and which everyone could see in the footage of the terrorist attacks on New York (which had only unfolded a week prior to the interview). Apart from the monstrousness of his statement it would, by the same token, be hypocritical to deny that Stockhausen failed to censor himself from uttering what was actually the first thought that occurred to

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[54] Weber, *Reader*, 2001, 119.
[55] Weber, *Reader*, 2001, 119.

many familiar with the (idioms of the) avant-garde art as they were watching the attack unfold.

9/11 was not of course the biggest artwork ever produced, but it was an artful tactical military operation that employed aesthetic means to create a unique 21st century mousetrap-like reversal of power that targeted the "guilty" conscience of the present day court and exposed the moral bankruptcy of its reign. Its success was grounded first in the artistry of locating the world's 21st century global court; and second, in presenting the cause in the very image of the enemy's own theatre of permanent war—one which builds on a generation of subject-spectators that have become fatally susceptible to what in 1936 Walter Benjamin predicted as our fate, to "experience its (our) own destruction as an aesthetic pleasure of the first order." [56]

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[56] Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations* (New York: Schocken Books), Kindle Edition, 242-243.