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Adaptation and the Postdramatic:
A Study of Heiner Müller in Non-European Performance

by

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Abstract

In his plays, Heiner Müller uses postdramatic techniques to challenge audiences. Adaptations of his work tend to either engage with these techniques or attempt to make his work more comprehensible for audiences.

In this thesis, I will investigate examples of Müller adaptations from different geographic locations outside of Europe. Each example uses a play by Müller to explore contemporary political issues. I will first cover the trend of adapting Müller textually, and the problems inherent in this process. Then I will provide an in-depth analysis of El Periférico de Objetos' *Máquina Hamlet*. This production, which is an Argentinean adaptation of Müller's seminal play *Hamletmachine*, uses postdramatic techniques that place spectators at the forefront in the production of meaning. As a result, *Máquina Hamlet* is able to link Müller not only to the political history of Argentina, but also to the history of violence in the world.

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Introduction

It is not through the direct thematization of the political that theatre becomes political but through the implicit substance and critical value of its *mode of representation*. (Hans-Thies Lehmann, 178)

While many new plays use non-realistic elements, North American theatre is still steeped in dramatic traditions in which political subjects are either addressed through linear narrative and clearly defined characters or through documentary approaches. These elements are generally written into dramatic scripts, which are viewed as the paramount component in any production. While these traditions are still present in some European theatre, in Europe there is a greater appreciation of and appetite for so-called postdramatic theatre, which may or may not use dramatic texts. While in North America, the categorization of political theatre is frequently reserved for plays that address topical political subjects, such as current wars and immigration debates, in postdramatic theatre, as Hans-Thies Lehmann states above, the political is explored through theatre as a mode of representation. Heiner Müller is a clear example of a postdramatic playwright who embraces the “implicit substance and critical value” of theatre as a mode of representation. Müller lived and worked in Germany during the Cold War. In his plays, he uses postdramatic “projections” of history to highlight present issues (Calandra 119). Unlike the historical allegories of Shakespeare and Brecht, Müller complicates the relationship of past and present through postdramatic techniques. He shatters this mirroring of present society and past

events by complicating substitution between contemporary figures and historical ones through a fracturing of voices and use of pastiche. Daniel Listoe believes that rather than showing historical events as other playwrights and authors do, “Müller goes all the way to the nerve centre of perception, to how we *see* history and what it is that masks our perceptions” (103). This focus on perception highlights both the similarities and gaps between history and present political events.

Müller's postdramatic aesthetics can be situated within a greater trajectory of the history of the dramatic text and the elements it employs, such as characters and a linear narrative. The questioning of the role of these elements in the theatre is not a new phenomenon. Rather, it can be traced back to the Ancient Greeks and Aristotle's seminal work of theatre criticism, *Poetics*. In this text, Aristotle introduces such terms as catharsis and mimesis. While not meant as a prescriptive document, definitions of these terms – and debates about them – have dominated theatre practice and criticism even into the twentieth-century. Aristotle's statements about what makes a plot, the types of characters in a tragedy and the necessary unity of action have all influenced the concept of a well-made play and the primacy of the text in Western theatre. In both the Renaissance and French Neo-Classical era, definitions and rules about what an appropriate theatre piece consists of were rife. During the Enlightenment, Gotthold Ephraim Lessing argued for a return to classical values in the theatre, and Aristotle's *Poetics* in particular. He posited that critics and playwrights attempting to create a unified and proper

drama had contaminated Aristotle's ideas. The Enlightenment also marked the beginning of the theatre as a space for moral instruction. Following the lead of Denis Diderot, playwrights began making plays that reflected everyday life situations and were meant to instruct. In response to the Enlightenment, Romantic playwrights also explored everyday existence and relied on contained linear narratives, but with an emphasis on the subjectivity of the individual no longer limited by rational thought.

The limitations of the Enlightenment and Romanticism to respond to the changes of modernity led to the trends of Realism and Naturalism, which began in the nineteenth-century. Realistic approaches proposed that the solution to representation in the theatre was to show everyday life onstage as realistically as possible. A well-made play was now ideally a reflection of life – unresolved and messy – yet still steeped in narrative and linearity. In direct response to the popularization of Realism and Naturalism, Modern art movements, and specifically the historical avant-gardes, moved away from the representation of the real. In the first half of the twentieth-century, the historical avant-gardes embraced the crisis of drama generated by the proliferation of new media and mass production. Artists were self-reflexive about form and were keenly aware of the audience, whom they confronted mentally and sometimes physically. Play texts from this era range from the more linear works of the Expressionists to the fractured and unstageable works of the Futurists. The main goal of these avant-garde artists was to move art into everyday existence and out of the theatres. However, in the end, the historical avant-garde failed to accomplish this goal and

art remained an institution. In the theatre, the domination of Realism and the primacy of the written text remained, especially in North America.

By mid-century, the most influential theatre maker and critic was Bertolt Brecht, whose previously mentioned technique of historicization was part of his concept of an epic theatre. Proposed as a replacement for the dramatic theatre, epic theatre uses techniques such as alienation and narrative to create an objective yet potentially politically engaging experience. While an active attempt to move away from dramatic traditions and a precursor to postdramatic theatre practice, Brecht's aesthetics still rely on many dramatic conventions, such as the necessity of narrative. Hans-Thies Lehmann notes "the theory of epic theatre constituted a *renewal and completion of classical dramaturgy*. Brecht's theory contained a highly traditionalist thesis: the *fable (story)* remained the sine qua non for him" (33). In the 1960s, Theatre of the Absurd also sought to challenge existing dramatic conventions. Theatre of the Absurd extends the popularization of existential thought to the theatre and highlights the inherent contradictions of the form through metatheatrical techniques. However, like Brecht's attempt to move away from dramatic form, Theatre of the Absurd fails at moving beyond the primacy of the text, the author and the narrative – however boundless the latter may be. According to Lehmann, Theatre of the Absurd "renounces the visible meaningfulness of the dramatic action but in the midst of the decomposition of sense sticks surprisingly strictly to the classical unities of drama" (53). Lehmann argues that it is not until the postdramatic that narrative and character are departed from altogether. Even with the continuing development of the postdramatic, in

contemporary theatre criticism this question of drama continues to inform debate about the cultural efficacy of the form. In the second half of the twentieth-century, Müller was a major figure in the challenge to existing dramatic forms and conventions. His fractured and complex writings were created with the theatre in mind, and not as dramatic texts in and of themselves. Rather than attempting to follow any conventions or rules, Müller plays with and recycles the entire history of the theatre in his works and explodes expected conventions through postdramatic techniques. There is no clear time or place in which his texts take place, and frequently no definitive characters.

Although Müller died in 1995, his work continues to be produced regularly throughout Europe and many European critics write about Müller and his texts. In particular, the critical discourse on Müller and his plays in German is immense. However, outside of Europe, Müller has not received the same amount of critical attention. As I do not read German fluently, my study relies on the more sparse English-language critical material on his work. In an attempt to open up Müller's works to English-speaking theatre practitioners and critics, Carl Weber has translated a large amount of Müller's oeuvre into English. While some major German critics have also written about Müller in English (Lehmann), the bulk of available material is by English-speaking critics, such as Jonathan Kalb, David Barnett, Kirk Williams and Arlene Akiko Teraoka. While most of these critics write about Müller in article form, both Kalb and Teraoka have full-length books on Müller and his work. In this English-language criticism the most frequently analysed text is *Hamletmachine* (1977); however, close readings of

Der Auftrag (*The Mission*, 1979) and *Mauser* (*Mouse-Catcher*, 1970) have also been published. Critical discussions also frequently delve into Müller's personal context, including his relationship with the German Democratic Republic. The bulk of information about Müller's production history is also available primarily in German and focuses on productions mounted in German-speaking countries. The most in-depth study on non-European productions of Müller's work is *Müller in America* (2003), edited by Dan Friedman. Other English-language articles and books about Müller frequently refer to productions, such as Robert Wilson's well-known staging of *Hamletmachine*, but rarely at length. It is also possible to find reviews in English about productions that originated in other countries and then travelled to the United States or Europe.

Although he continues to be produced in Europe more than elsewhere, listings on the website <heinnermueller.de> show that there have been stagings of Müller's plays in South Korea, Australia, Canada, the United States, Argentina and Singapore in the past year. However, it can be difficult to access in-depth information about non-European productions of Müller's texts. The lack of studies about non-European productions is a gap in the ongoing discourse about Müller and his work. As Müller has been charged with being Eurocentric and overly intellectual, I became interested in how and if his work could effectively adapt to non-European contexts. The focus on non-European performance is not meant to reflect a valuing of non-European performance over European. Rather, the projects investigated potentially signify a way to (re)contextualize Müller on both a local and global scale. Productions of Müller outside of Europe are not

filled with overdetermined expectations surrounding his work as he is a lesser-known figure in international – and specifically English language - theatre. This potentially gives theatre makers outside of Europe more freedom to make new connections between Müller and contemporary political events.

I initially became aware of non-European adaptations of Müller with the Mudrooroo-Müller Project, which I first read about several years ago. This project was created in Australia in an attempt to unite Müller's text *Der Auftrag* (*The Mission*, 1979) with contemporary political issues surrounding Aboriginals. For the project, a textual adaptation of Müller's work was created and then workshopped. The adapted text, initially titled *The Aboriginal Protesters Confront the Declaration of the Australian Republic on 26 January 2001 with the Production of 'The Commission' by Heiner Müller*, was written by one of Australia's preeminent Aboriginal authors, Mudrooroo, and based on a translation of *Der Auftrag* by the project's dramaturg, Gerhard Fischer. Both texts are included in *The Mudrooroo/Müller Project: A Theatrical Casebook*, edited by Fischer. Following several years of struggling to get the play to the stage, *The Aboriginal Protesters* was finally produced in 1996, with a rather mixed critical reception. After encountering this example, I searched out other productions that adapt Müller's highly political and context-specific plays to comment on contemporary socio-political situations. I found an adaptation of Müller's *Mauser* (*Mouse-Catcher*, 1970) by American theatre academic Jonathan Kalb in the journal *Theater*. In this adapted script, entitled *Gulliver's Choice* (2005), Kalb transposes Müller's play to Iraq in order to investigate the American War on

Terror. While an exciting example of cultural transposition, *Gulliver's Choice* has never been fully produced. Midland Actors Theatre of Birmingham, England planned to produce it in 2008, but have put the project on hold.

In my search for productions that effectively transpose Müller's texts to a non-European cultural situation, I also actively looked for examples of postdramatic theatre that do not try to textually adapt Müller's work. This led to my discovery of the Buenos Aires based company El Periférico de Objetos' version of Müller's *Hamletmachine* (1977). Their production, *Máquina Hamlet* (1995), was created and performed in Argentina, and later toured to North America, Europe and Australia. Also from a country with a violent past, El Periférico de Objetos was able to produce Müller's text without creating a new script first. Instead, the company uses Müller's text in dialogue with other elements of performance, including multimedia and puppetry. There is extensive written material on *Máquina Hamlet* in English and Spanish - languages which are accessible to me. Many of these sources are available online through the websites of El Periférico de Objetos' members. Gabriela Massuh and Dieter Welke translated *Hamletmachine* into Spanish specifically for this production, and this text is posted on company member Emilio García Wehbi's website. A video recording of the production is also available at New York Public Library's Theatre on Film and Tape Archive. In contrast with my other examples, viewing the recording has made an in-depth performance analysis and close reading of the production possible. As *Hamletmachine* is Müller's most commonly produced

play in North America, information on the text is also readily available from critics including Jonathan Kalb, Brian Walsh and Kirk Williams.

Adapting Müller – whether textually or through staging – is important for the political efficacy of a production. Baz Kershaw points out the importance of context by arguing that “A performance that could be considered ‘radical’ or ‘revolutionary’ or ‘progressive’ in one place or perspective might be seen as quite the opposite in another” (69). In each of these examples, the artists working on these projects acknowledge the gap between their own contexts and Müller’s, and attempt to bring the two together through adaptation. Although each project adapts a different Müller text, they are linked through his constant use of violent images and themes. The three texts by Müller - *Der Auftrag* (1979), *Hamletmachine* (1977) and *Mauser* (1970) – all also involve struggles between individual freedom and social expectations. While I originally planned to discuss all three projects at length and find links between them, I have decided to focus on *Máquina Hamlet* for two reasons. First, the amount of critical information on this production makes it feasible to write about it in depth. More importantly, this example is a full production and thus allows for a more extensive analysis of the efficacy of Müller’s text in performance. Müller’s texts were deliberately created to challenge future theatre practitioners. Without some level of staging his plays are incomplete; full meaning can only be acquired in the performative context, which always necessitates some level of adaptation. I have also included extensive information about *The Aboriginal Protesters*, as the project provides an excellent counterpoint to the techniques used in *Máquina Hamlet*.

Because of the route that this critical journey has taken, this thesis is composed of two chapters – one that deals with broader aspects of Müller adaptations and one that investigates the example of *Máquina Hamlet*. Chapter One begins with an overview of Müller’s work and how it has been produced and critically received internationally. Although I concentrate on *Máquina Hamlet* as the primary example in this thesis, I include information about other projects in this chapter, including a critical discussion of *The Aboriginal Protesters*. The inclusion of examples of textual adaptations demonstrates the difference between dramatic and postdramatic approaches to political theatre. The first chapter also provides the groundwork for my analysis of *Máquina Hamlet*, as the postdramatic is placed alongside other theoretical and practical approaches, including intermediality. It is important to note that the use of Hans-Thies Lehmann’s *Postdramatic Theatre* as a theoretical basis for this study is limited to the English translation of this book, which is much shorter than the German original. Chapter Two is an extensive analysis of El Periférico de Objetos’ *Máquina Hamlet*. This analysis includes an investigation of the techniques El Periférico de Objetos uses and of the production’s critical reception. In opposition to the examples of textual adaptation, *Máquina Hamlet* demonstrates how a postdramatic text can be experimented with onstage. Rather than making the Müller text more linear and comprehensible for non-European audiences, El Periférico de Objetos revels in the text’s gaps and the active spectatorship it demands of an audience.

As *Máquina Hamlet* employs postdramatic techniques, this performance analysis does not follow a structural approach. Christopher B Balme notes, in a

discussion of different types of performance analyses, that for postdramatic theatre:

Structural analysis may prove too limiting because the performance may be less about the ‘structure of signs’ on stage than about spectatorial experience of space or experiential confrontation with a bleeding or urinating body. For these reasons, it is not possible to establish a fixed structure of steps. Each work will require a different approach. (146)

As Balme notes, postdramatic theatre revels in gaps and places the center for meaning making on the spectator. While still acknowledging the intentional gaps in the production, my analysis zooms in on aesthetic choices and then places them within greater theories of the postdramatic and intermediality – both of which revel in ambiguity and the role of the spectator in the meaning making process. In this way, the analysis mimics the structure of *Máquina Hamlet* itself as the piece constantly zooms in and leads the spectator to the verge of concrete meaning making before exploding the images onstage and creating new links between them. The theoretical frameworks of the postdramatic and intermediality are integrated into the analysis as much as possible. The main exception is an extended discussion of intermediality in contemporary performance studies, which appears near the beginning of the chapter and lays the groundwork for much of the analysis and subsequent discussion. Following Balme’s statement, the gaps and lack of definitive meaning deny the possibility of a programmatic or overly organized analysis. As such, the performance analysis of *Máquina Hamlet*

does not offer a specific repeatable approach to analyzing postdramatic theatre. This performance analysis differs from other approaches to postdramatic performance as there is an accessible text from which the piece was created. Frequently postdramatic theatre is created without a specific text in mind, which would lead to a different approach to analysis. Also, the video recording of *Máquina Hamlet* enables an in-depth analysis of simultaneous elements, which would be impossible without access to the recording.

Because of the onus placed on the spectator in this production, I employ reception theory from a phenomenological background in my analysis. Using concepts of the postdramatic and intermediality as my basis, I explore the multiple ways in which the piece has been received and how this diversity of opinion allows the performance to work on both a local and a global scale. The members of El Periférico de Objetos cite several European artists and postdramatic theatre makers as inspirations. Since they are influenced by a European theatre model, I am able to focus my analysis of their production on their use of postdramatic techniques. These techniques relate to critical definitions of ontological intermediality. Both the postdramatic and ontological intermediality are phenomenological approaches that place the spectator at the forefront of the meaning making process. As such, my analysis centers on how *Máquina Hamlet* is received differently depending on spectators' own subjectivities and expectations. It is this aspect of the production that allows the thematically ambiguous Müller text to affect spectators in multiple – and sometimes contradictory – ways. I highlight the techniques the company employs

with a constant awareness of how they open up the text to ambiguity and multiple meanings, rather than closing it. As Lehmann states in the quotation that opens this introduction, theatre as a mode of production, rather than any thematic content, is what makes it political. El Periférico de Objetos' production exemplifies theatre's ability to produce uncanny images that play with the audience's existing expectations of the form.

Chapter One: (Re)contextualizing Heiner Müller

Heiner Müller: Life and Work

East German playwright Heiner Müller (1929-1995) was a forerunner in the development of a nonlinear, intellectually demanding form of theatre during the second half of the twentieth-century. As Müller lived through the Second World War and wrote throughout the Cold War, his plays reflect the instability of the German Democratic Republic and Europe over the course of the twentieth-century. Although in his later life, Müller was lauded in both East and West Germany, during the Cold War he had a turbulent relationship with the German Democratic Republic. In 1965, the GDR banned Müller's plays along with the works of other prominent writers, including Wolf Biermann and Christa Wolf. The regime considered these works examples of extravagant bourgeois art that failed to conform to the GDR's aesthetic and ideological beliefs. The ban on publishing and presenting Müller's work was not lifted until 1973 – at which point Müller was already making a name for himself in the West (Teraoka, *East* 106). Because of Müller's increasing popularity outside the GDR, the regime had less power to criticize him. At this point, Müller's work had also moved away from the themes of collective work and the German experience. Instead, Müller was taking from historical discourse, literature and mythology in order to create dense texts that comment on both Germany and the rest of the world (Teraoka, *Silence* 9-11). These adaptations from well-known primary sources are Müller's best-known works.

Müller's plays include *Germania Tod in Berlin* (*Germania Death in Berlin*, 1971), *Der Auftrag* (*The Mission*, 1979) and *Quartett* (*Quartet*, 1980). The first two plays are primarily based on historical events and situations, while *Quartett* uses Choderlos de Laclos' novel *Les Liaisons Dangereuses* (1782) as its main source. Most seminal of Müller's works is *Hamletmaschine* (1977), which fuses characters from *Hamlet* with Müller's bleak worldview. During Müller's lifetime, he frequently directed his own works. One of his most famous directing projects was his massive *Hamlet/Machine* (1990), an eight-hour performance that incorporated both Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and *Hamletmaschine* for Berlin's *Deutsches Theater* (Barnett, "Resisting" 192-3). While Müller's directorial role has garnered some critical attention, it is his role as a playwright that is his legacy. In his plays, Müller challenges both audiences and theatre artists to examine the relationships between text, performance and history. According to the playwright he creates "A world of images...that does *not* lend itself to conceptual formulation and that cannot be reduced to a one-dimensional metaphor" ("19 Answers" 138).

Critical studies about Müller frequently focus on his aesthetic and ideological beliefs, and how these compare to those of his predecessors. Müller's forbearers are varied, ranging from major figures such as Shakespeare to more contemporary theatre artists such as Antonin Artaud. However, the theatre artist Müller is most commonly compared to is Bertolt Brecht, his predecessor as Germany's most influential playwright. Although Heiner Müller considers his relationship with Brecht to be a starting point rather than a key to his work, critics

tend to focus on this relationship – perhaps because of North American and British familiarity with Brecht rather than Müller. An overview of this comparison provides an apt starting point for investigating some of the critical discussions about Müller’s aesthetics and politics. Müller began with a clear Brechtian influence in his early plays, such as *Der Lohndrucker* (*The Scab*, 1957) and *Die Korrektur* (*The Correction*, 1958), which use a social realist aesthetic. However, he moves away from his predecessor both aesthetically and ideologically by the late 1960s. After this time, Müller calls his relationship with Brecht “parricidal” (qtd. in Vanden Heuvel 11), as he actively attempts to explode the dominating specter of Brecht so that he can move forward aesthetically. This destructive impulse does not signal a lack of respect on Müller’s part. According to David Kilpatrick, “There is no doubt that Müller learned from Brecht, and revered him as a seminal influence. But like any worthy student/son he –in Oedipal fashion- kills the teacher/father” (122). Instead of containing a lesson and narrative as Brecht’s plays do, Müller’s later works lack any clearly definable time, space or moral. The use of non-linear fragments with no clear source, and frequently no defined speaker, gives these works a surreal quality. Michael Vanden Heuvel calls this an “antistructure” that explodes Brecht’s aesthetics (11). Müller’s travels to the United States and Mexico in 1975 and 1976 also impacted this shift ideologically. At this point, rather than focusing, as Brecht did, on issues directly relating to his own context, Müller’s work begins to contain a universal worldview and an awareness of the Third World. He also moves away from Brecht’s influence ideologically by rejecting orthodox Marxism. In a more

postmodern vein, Müller purports that all dominant beliefs about history are potentially flawed – including the official stance of the GDR (McGowan 129-130). Müller also differs from both Brecht and the GDR's ideological beliefs by alleging that individuals can never have complete agency in their existence, as there will always be forces beyond their own control.

Beyond comparisons with Brecht, it is difficult to clearly define Müller's style. This problem is partly related to the many gaps between when Müller's works were written, performed and published. However, the difficulty in classifying his work was also intentionally fuelled by Müller himself, as he did not want to be placed into any particular ideological or theoretical movement. In order to prevent critics from pinning him down, Müller would contradict himself in interviews by changing his position on subjects and quoting others without citing them (Malkin 74). When critics attempted to define Müller as a postmodern, Müller claimed postmodernism "is a theme...that doesn't interest me at all" (qtd. in Turner 190). Müller also resisted placing his work into categories or movements, claiming "I could write a play like *Hamletmachine* tomorrow and the day after tomorrow one like *Lohndrucker*. This idea of periodisation is complete nonsense" (qtd. in Turner 192).

While there is debate about how to group his works, critics generally agree that *Hamletmachine* (1977) and *Der Auftrag* (1979) mark a shift in Müller's aesthetics. These two works are considered to be more serious and deconstructed than his earlier ones, marking the beginning of Müller's more universal worldview after his travels abroad. Both plays also contain what Müller calls

“*synthetische Fragmente*” (synthetic fragments), and which other critics refer to as montage (Lehmann, Teraoka) or vampiring (Kalb). This technique, which Müller began using in the 1970s, explodes the idea of intertextuality by openly quoting other authors’ words and/or styles. When using this technique, Müller strings together quotes from a range of sources and mixes them together with his own words. This practice adds to the difficulty of discussing Müller’s works in any taxonomic way. Jeanette Malkin argues that this use of fragments “refuses the idea of textual ‘integrity’ and instead sees each work as both text and pretext for further texts, creating reusable modular writings,” which results in Müller’s works being “coextensive and simultaneous, rather than chronological – time-bound” (79). Synthetic fragments also have an ideological effect, as Müller shows both reverence to his predecessors and animosity towards them when he tears their works apart.

Hamletmachine: The Seminal Work

Outside of Europe, *Hamletmachine* is the most commonly produced and analysed Müller text (C. Weber, “Heiner” 7). In *Hamletmachine*, Müller toys with language by using synthetic fragments from many authors including Walter Benjamin, William Shakespeare, E.E. Cummings, T.S. Eliot, Andy Warhol and even himself (Kalb, “On” 50). The use of these fragments and the inclusion of a Hamlet character as the proxy for the playwright’s own privileged subject position led Müller to refer to the text as “self critique of the intellectual’s position” (qtd. in Calandra 128). Because of the intentional ambiguity and lack of

linear narrative in *Hamletmachine*, as well as the multiple interpretations by *Hamletmachine*'s critics, it is difficult to synthesize this work for discussion. Several critics have attempted close readings of the text (Teraoka, *Silence*; Walsh; Williams, "Ghost"); however, these examples inevitably search for narrative and meaning, and get caught up in trying to find definitive answers about this deliberately open text. In my assessment, I would like to keep the text as open as possible; however, a few key aspects can be noted. Douglas Nash cites the commonly held belief that at the beginning of the text the Hamlet character is the son of a now-dead high ranking member of the Communist party in an Eastern European country, a riff on the plot of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* (165). While other characters from Shakespeare's play appear, their status is complicated by metatheatrical devices that reveal the live bodies onstage to be actors performing these parts. Within this structure of constantly changing identities, Müller challenges the role of western intellectuals in society and comments on the ongoing and oppressive presence of history in the present. A constant cycle of history, and resulting cycle of violence, proves inescapable for the characters who are caught between a desire for action and the inability to act.

In the critical reception of *Hamletmachine* there is disagreement over how to refer to and discuss the various voices that appear in the text. Some critics refer to the voices as a split subjectivity, while others suggest they are all facets of one character's subjectivity. The focus on split subjectivity revolves around the roles of Hamlet and Ophelia, and the possibility that they are two opposing aspects of one personality. However, this notion of a dual personality is complicated as the

play progresses. While Michael Richardson initially suggests that Hamlet and Ophelia are opposing aspects of one main character, rather than two separate ones, he moves beyond this notion when discussing the third act in the text - "Scherzo" - in which Hamlet dresses in Ophelia's clothes and dances with Horatio. Richardson contends that at this point in the text, the two characters' subjectivities are so intermingled that "any possibility of a one-to-one substitution is lost" (90). The belief that Ophelia and Hamlet are, according to Jonathan Kalb, "opposing aspects of a single creative consciousness" ("On" 56) is further complicated by the inclusion of a speaker who states "I am Ophelia," but who is named "not as Ophelia but rather as "Ophelia [Chorus/Hamlet]" (54). Hamlet and Ophelia are not the only characters implicated in this complicated subjectivity. Another speaker is referred to as "Claudius/Hamlet's Father," which melds Hamlet's two father figures into one. Müller affirms that *Hamletmachine* "is a choral text, a collective experience, not a personal experience. When I write 'Chorus/Hamlet,' people don't read it, they don't want to...But in *Hamletmachine* there are lots of Hamlets" ("Introduction" 75). Over the course of the play the dense language and multiple citations further complicate the identity and subjectivity of these performers, with Ophelia morphing into Electra, and Hamlet and Ophelia interchanging both their clothes and their roles. Additionally, the synthetic fragments obscure the speakers' subjectivities as their words come from a variety of sources. Magda Romanska defines Müller's Ophelia not as a character, but rather as "a poetic agglomeration of metaphors and images" (64). This "agglomeration" makes Ophelia the sum of many referents, including

Shakespeare's Ophelia and Hamlet, Electra, Rosa Luxemburg, Ulrike Meinhof, Müller's suicidal wife Inge Schwenkner, and "the woman sitting next to you in the auditorium" (Friedman and Newman 136).

Hamletmachine is also an excellent example of how Müller "vampires" (Kalb) other authors. While Müller uses fragments from many authors, *Hamletmachine*'s most dominant hypotext is Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. Müller wrote *Hamletmachine* after doing a close translation of *Hamlet*, an experience that made him antagonistic towards Shakespeare and his work. Of the experience, Müller states, "I wrote *Hamletmachine*, which was like a shrunken head. Cannibals shrink the heads of their enemies. Shakespeare is my enemy. *Hamletmachine* is the shrunken head of *Hamlet*. I cannibalized Shakespeare, so now Shakespeare is part of my body. He's in my blood. I ate him" (qtd. in Holmberg 65). Part of this cannibalization of Shakespeare involves a playful appropriation of his aesthetics, including metatheatrical devices. James L Calderwood notes that there are constant theatre references in *Hamlet*, such as the inclusion of the travelling players, allusions to playing parts and the frequent use of the terms 'act' and 'play' (30). In *Hamletmachine*, Müller refers to this metatheatricality by making the act of playing a role an active decision. Near the end of the text, The Actor Playing Hamlet rejects his role, stating, "I'm not Hamlet. I don't take part any more. My words have nothing to tell me anymore. My thoughts suck the blood out of the images. My drama doesn't happen anymore. Behind me the set is put up. By people who aren't interested in my drama, for people to whom it means nothing" (56). This refusal to act mirrors Shakespeare's Hamlet, who questions

his own (in)ability to act out his part in the revenge of his father's murder, and is constantly plagued by deferral.

Another metatheatrical device Shakespeare uses is the *mise en abyme* of "The Murder of Gonzago." On a basic level, this play within a play is metatheatrical because the actors performing in *Hamlet* play travelling players who perform a mirroring of the *Hamlet* story for the court. However, Calderwood argues that there are many more layers to Shakespeare's metatheatricality. Calderwood notes that Hamlet's rewriting and renaming of the *mise en abyme* links the character to Shakespeare himself through the act of playwrighting (94). In *Hamletmachine*, Müller plays with this association by exploding the connection between Hamlet and himself. Müller titles his work *Hamletmachine*, which includes two words – "Hamlet" and "Machine" – that create his initials, H.M. This title has fuelled speculation about autobiographical aspects of the text (Kalb, "On" 49-50). Calderwood also points out that in his rewriting of "The Murder of Gonzago," Hamlet names the murderer Lucianus as the King's nephew, rather than his brother. This act links Hamlet's father's murder by his brother and the future murder of Claudius by Hamlet, his nephew. It also confuses Hamlet's own subjectivity as Lucianus portrays the actions of his uncle, but represents his familial position. This confusing mixture of roles from Hamlet's world in the *mise en abyme* reflects the previously discussed confusion over roles and subjectivities in *Hamletmachine*.

Heiner Müller in Production

Because of their fragmentary nature and lack of clear stage directions, Müller's plays are a challenge to produce. His texts are not geared towards any one type of staging or interpretation, but instead offer dense passages that challenge any potential director to make their own decisions about staging. Robert Wilson summarizes the openness of a Müller text by declaring "you can put it in the middle of a highway and drive a steamroller over it. You can put it in the swimming pool in Hollywood. You can put it on the moon. He gives so much space. You can take a work like *Hamletmachine* and you can perform it with one person or you can perform it with a thousand" (125). In the past, Müller has been charged with being too Eurocentric and elitist for English-speaking audiences. However, his work is increasingly being produced outside of Europe, especially by university groups interested in exploring ways to stage his open texts. In fact, the first American production of a Müller text was a performance of *Mauser* produced at the University of Austin in 1975. This was followed by a production of *Cement* (1973) directed by Sue-Ellen Case at UC Berkeley in 1979 (C. Weber, "Heiner" 5). These productions paved the way for the most well-known production of Müller's work in North America: Robert Wilson's production of *Hamletmachine* at New York University's Tisch School of the Arts in 1986. This was not the first or last collaboration between Müller and Wilson, and, because of the high profile of both men, the production received a large amount of media coverage. In interviews about the production, Wilson claims he did not try to interpret the text, but rather worked on movement and then added the text on top

(Williams, “Ghost” 201). His production used a sparse aesthetic in an attempt to highlight the language, even though the words did not come into play until fifty minutes into the performance (Bathrick, “Robert” 73). Upon seeing the production, Müller claimed it was “the best production ever” (qtd. in Bathrick, “Robert” 67) precisely because of its sparse nature and lack of interpretation. Other critical reception was more mixed, with debate as to whether Wilson’s strategy highlighted or resisted Müller’s text.

A brief look at *Hamletmachine*’s production history in America exemplifies how open Müller’s text is. Robert Wilson’s production has led to a trend of low tech productions of the play. One example is New World Performance Lab’s 2000 production, which was performed in the United States, Colombia and Italy. This production featured three multilingual actors interacting with three lights, a telescope and boxes filled with miscellaneous items (Slowiak 89). This minimalist aesthetic allowed the production’s polylingual use of language to be highlighted (90). As *Hamletmachine* is an extremely adaptable text, there are also many examples of high tech productions of the play. An installation produced by UCLA in 2000 used fifteen audio fragments from Müller’s text, which looped together and played at a particular volume according to where a spectator’s shadow fell. The piece was set up in rooms in Los Angeles, Weimar and Sydney with an internet link connecting the three locations (Burke 83-5). *Hamletmachine* has also been produced outside of traditional theatre or art spaces. In 2000, Minneapolis’ Praxis Group performed the play in various public spaces across the city. The group did not get permission to perform in any of these

locales, which led to several intense situations including an encounter with a riot squad monitoring an animal genetics conference in a pedestrian mall. As the conference had attracted animal rights activists, this location opened up the show to politically activated spectators who would not necessarily go to the production otherwise (Magelssen and Troyer 100-103). In recent years, Müller's plays have continued to be produced by university departments more frequently than by professional companies. One notable exception is New York's Castillo Theatre, which has produced over ten of Müller's works (C. Weber, "Heiner" 6). While this brief survey follows the most readily available material and therefore primarily discusses Müller's productions in America, it is important to note that there have also been productions of his work in Australia, Canada, the United Kingdom, Latin America and Japan.

Theoretical Approaches

Müller's texts and productions of them link to two emerging trends in theatrical discourse: the postdramatic and intermediality. Hans-Thies Lehmann defines Müller's challenging texts as "postdramatic," a term he uses to describe trends in theatre since the 1960s rather than one particular performance aesthetic or movement. According to Lehmann it

is not simply a new kind of text of staging – and even less a new type of theatre text, but rather a type of sign usage in the theatre that turns both of these levels of theatre upside down through the structurally changed quality of the performance text: it becomes

more presence than representation, more shared than communicated experience, more process than product, more manifestation than signification, more energetic impulse than information. (85)

Because of its broad scope, postdramatic theatre is difficult to synthesize for discussion. However, some key aspects can be noted. In postdramatic theatre mimesis, signification and action are no longer the main tenets of performance. Instead, performance becomes a “theatre of states” with a focus on atmosphere rather than plot (74). This type of theatre does not aim at creating a cohesive, comprehensible product; rather, through techniques such as fragmentation, simultaneity and a density of signs, it demands active spectatorship in which the viewer has the opportunity “to process the simultaneous by means of their own selection and structuring” (88).

Although postdramatic theatre comes out of the tradition of drama and is not anti-dramatic, postdramatic texts differ from dramatic texts because they do not focus on plot, characters or other aspects of mimetic representation. While dramatic texts expect audience members to fill in “predictable gaps,” postdramatic texts revel in gaps and work to suspend any definitive meaning making (Jürs-Munby 6). David Barnett describes postdramatic writing as something that “suggests itself as a relativized element for performance from the outset and points to its own indeterminacy and status as uninterpreted material” (“When” 16). Lehmann notes that Heiner Müller’s works are definitively postdramatic. He describes Müller’s texts as particularly effective at creating an

atmosphere in which audiences have to find their own way to structure the material because he “load[s] so much onto the readers and spectators that they cannot possibly process everything” (87). As Müller is already considered to be postdramatic, I am interested in productions that use postdramatic techniques to explore his texts, allowing their openness to challenge audiences in a non-didactic way. Because postdramatic theatre puts the onus on spectators and can therefore be received in infinite ways, its political efficacy has been questioned. However, Lehmann argues that it is this very focus on perception that makes the postdramatic political. He believes that “the mode of perception in theatre cannot be separated from the existence of theatre in a world of media which massively shapes all perception” (185).

The primacy of perception in postdramatic theatre links it to another area of performance studies: intermediality. Contemporary notions of intermediality focus on the ways we perceive the world. Peter M Boenisch defines it as “an effect performed in-between mediality, supplying multiple perspectives, and foregrounding the making of meaning rather than obediently transmitting meaning” (103). Intermedial critics use the term ‘in-between,’ rather than ‘liminal,’ to discuss an intermedial experience. As liminality is used in both postcolonial and anthropological studies, which differ from the postdramatic and intermediality through a focus on essence and linear transformations, I have chosen to use the term ‘in-between’ in my analysis. Liminal spaces are considered to be radical, unique or sacred, whereas the term ‘in-between’ refers to a state of existence. The in-between also implies meeting points, crossovers and

intersections between different media and experiences. Freda Chapple and Chiel Kattenbelt use the in-between to define intermediality as “a space where the boundaries soften - and we are in-between and within a mixing of spaces, media and realities” (12). In my analysis of Müller productions, I use this concept of intermediality to interrogate how practitioners link Müller to contemporary modes of perception, and how this link can make Müller relevant to a new generation.

Both postdramatic and intermedial performance studies focus on perception and the subjective reactions of theatre practitioners and spectators. Because of this, looking at performance through contemporary definitions of postdramatic and intermedial performance demands a more phenomenological than semiotic approach. Phenomenology focuses on lived experiences rather than scientific and objective views of the world. Both in the world outside and in the theatre, perception and experience are based on an individual’s horizon of expectations. Spectators make meaning from what they know and have already experienced through interactions with other people. According to Stephen De Paul, in a phenomenological approach to the world “phenomena are always apprehended ‘as-meant’ by the subject perceiving them. Intentionality is a central doctrine in phenomenology for it situates philosophy in the ‘lived experience’ of the individual subject” (140). In contemporary existence, this perception is shaped not only by traditional human-to-human interactions, but also by interactions with media. Götz Dapp argues that phenomena are always perceived within a context “which is created by other media [and] produces a framework within which the phenomenon is perceived. It is both the trace of the medium and the trace of the

framework that is meaning-producing” (60). Thus, in the theatre, expectations about the medium itself impact reception. Postdramatic theatre accepts the phenomenological proposition that “the world resists our attempts to interpret and master it, despite the fact that it constitutes our subjective existence” (De Paul 141). With postdramatic theatre or texts, such as those by Heiner Müller, no one interpretation is possible. There is no way to master a postdramatic text – attempts to create any clear meaning or interpretation will only make it dramatic.

While a postdramatic approach to theatre demands a more phenomenological method of analysis, it is important to note that semiotics still play a role in this field of study. Phenomenologist Bert O. States argues that phenomenology and semiotics are not binaries, but that solely using a semiotic approach in the theatre is problematic as it avoids the perceptual and sensory effects of performance (7). In my analysis, I use the term ‘sign’ to discuss theatrical elements and how they may be perceived. However, this is done with an acknowledgment that in postdramatic performance meaning is always in flux. This aspect of the postdramatic reflects the belief in phenomenology that objects can no longer be considered “as the mere ‘fulfillment’ of a sign which is previously defined in some way or other” (States 23). In my analyses of productions, I look at reception and how spectators have received different images and signs. However, in examples that employ postdramatic techniques, individual spectators frequently receive signs differently from the rest of the audience.

Heiner Müller: Contemporary Iterations outside of Europe

One of Müller's collaborators, Stephan Suschke, in reference to the events of 11 September 2001 comments, "I regret that Müller did not live to see this apocalyptic tragedy. I am very interested to know what he would have said about these events" (62). While Müller, who died in 1995, is not alive to comment on contemporary events, his provocative recontextualizing of history continues to be explored in different cultural environments. In recent years, his plays have been increasingly produced in non-European countries. As an English-speaking North American, I am interested in projects by companies who look at Müller's work as part of a process of interaction, appropriation and resistance. In my search for new interpretations of Müller, the difficulty in adapting a non-linear and ideologically ambiguous text into different cultural contexts has become apparent. Rather than exploding Müller's already dense and fragmented texts, theatre practitioners often try to make sense of them and make them dramatic for audiences unfamiliar with Müller's techniques. Tony Kushner notes that Müller's texts "were written intentionally to resist production, to make of their production an act of appropriation" (xvi). Müller was aware of this challenge, and stated in an interview with Arthur Holmberg that "To write a text you just need a typewriter and paper – you can be more innovative in the theatre. The theatre is an industry that is much more resistant to new ideas, new developments, new inventions" (63).

In North America, textual adaptations of Müller are easier to access than recordings of productions. Several of these textual adaptations attempt to link

Müller to contemporary events in the post-9/11 world by transposing his texts to the present day. One example is Fawzia Afzal-Khan's *Scheherazade Goes West* (2004), an adaptation of Müller's *Medeamaterial*. In her text, Afzal-Khan fuses Müller's version of Medea with the character Scheherazade from *One Thousand and One Nights*. As a Muslim performer in a post-9/11 world, Afzal-Khan investigates the intersections of class and race both in traditional literature and contemporary society by mixing Müller's text in with references to the Qur'an, Allah, Osama bin Laden and the War of Terror. The script was workshopped in October 2002 by *Compagnie Faim de Siecle* in New York City. Since then, Afzal-Khan has performed the script as a work in progress, at conferences and events. In 2007, she performed pieces of it at Washington, D.C.'s Smithsonian Institute as part of Women's History Month (Schechner and Sanford 14). However, I have found no evidence of a full production or external critical material on the work. Jonathan Kalb's adaptation of Müller's *Mauser* (*Mouse-Catcher*, 1970) poses the same problem, as the textual adaptation links Müller to contemporary events, but has not been performed in full. An American academic who has published extensively on Müller, Kalb transposes Müller's text to the recent American invasion of Iraq in his adaptation, *Gulliver's Choice* (2005). This choice of location elides contemporary colonizing with Müller's interest in Europe's history of imperialism. Kalb first approached Müller with a desire to adapt *Mauser* in 1989, but was unable to complete the script until a new impetus of inspiration came in the form of the American invasion of Iraq. Using the war as a backdrop, Kalb transfers Müller's obsession with revolution to an exploration of freedom

and the morality of warfare. The script follows several of Müller's conventions, including not attributing lines to a particular character. Consequently, it allows directors artistic license on the stage. However, while Kalb's text was performed as a staged reading in both New York City and Berlin in 2004, it has yet to be fully produced.

Production Examples

Another project that began as a textual adaptation is *The Aboriginal Protesters*, a play built upon Müller's *Der Auftrag* (*The Task*, 1979). The basic plot of Müller's play is taken from Anna Segher's story *Das Licht auf dem Galgen* (*The Light on the Gallows*, 1962), which follows three French revolutionaries, Galloudec, Sasportas and Debuisson, on a mission to bring the revolution to Jamaica. During their time in Jamaica at the turn of the nineteenth century, Napoleon comes to power in France, effectively ending the French Revolution. This event leads Debuisson – the wealthy and educated son of landowners – to give up on their mission. The French peasant Galloudec and the former slave Sasportas continue with their plan; however, both end up dying in the process. In *Der Auftrag*, Müller keeps these basic plot points, but intermingles the story with debates about revolution and a surreal montage that follows a government functionary on another unnamed task. Müller's text also makes reference to Brecht's *Lehrstück, Die Maßnahme* (*The Measures Taken*, 1934). However, as previously discussed, Müller's use of Brecht reflects both a respect for and a critique of his predecessor. In this case, mimicking the *Lehrstück* format

critiques Brecht's didacticism, as Müller's characters do not learn anything from their experience and a cycle of violence continues.

In 1987, Gerhard Fischer, the head of German Studies at the University of New South Wales, imagined dramaturging a theatre piece that would counter Australia's Bicentennial celebrations of the First Fleet entering Sydney Harbour in 1788. The desire for an Aboriginal voice within this context led Fischer to choose *Der Auftrag* as the textual basis for his project. Fischer was interested in how the play links the colonial world to the French Revolution through the theme of betrayal. He began by translating *Der Auftrag* and writing what he calls a "dramaturgical exposé" in which he created a concept for a new play built upon the Müller text (*Mudrooroo* 5). This concept revolves around a group of Aboriginal actors rehearsing a production of *Der Auftrag* to be performed as a protest piece during the Bicentennial. Fischer hoped this *mise en abyme* would highlight the tension between contemporary characters and their understanding of history ("Playwrights" 263). He also wanted the *mise en abyme* to act as a Brechtian *Lehrstück* in which the performers, and by association the audience, would learn something – although Fischer did not yet know what this lesson was to be (*Mudrooroo* 11). After creating this concept, Fischer sought out Aboriginal collaborators. While he had been working on the assumption that a strong Aboriginal theatre company existed in Sydney, once he approached different Aboriginal groups he found that this was not the case. One of Fischer's harshest critics, Gerry Turcotte, claims that by imagining the project before exploring the

Aboriginal theatre scene, Fischer had “unwittingly mobilize[d] a phantom Aboriginal theatre” (184).

In July 1990, after the Bicentennial had already passed, Fischer contacted Brian Syron, an Aboriginal theatre director. Syron agreed to direct the piece and recommended Aboriginal writer Mudrooroo as playwright for the narrative frame around *Der Auftrag*. Before approaching Mudrooroo, Syron and Fischer agreed that *Der Auftrag* was “to be left untouched, as a core, that the writer’s job will be to write a scenario for the actors around this core” (Fischer, *Mudrooroo* 9).

Mudrooroo completed the script, titled *The Aboriginal Protesters Confront the Declaration of the Australian Republic with the Production of The Commission by Heiner Müller*, in the summer of 1991. While Mudrooroo kept most of Fischer’s original ideas intact, he changed the event being protested from the Bicentennial to an imaginary proclamation of an Australian Republic in January 2001.

Mudrooroo also twisted Fischer’s desire for a *Lehrstück* within the play by having his Aboriginal characters learn in a Brechtian fashion that the Müller text does not work for their needs. At the end of the play, once the entire text of *Der Auftrag* has been rehearsed, Mudrooroo’s characters “put Müller to the vote” (120) and choose not to perform the play at the declaration of the Republic. They debate about *Der Auftrag*’s merits throughout Mudrooroo’s frame and, in the end, decide staging a protest would be more productive.

Both Syron and Fischer felt that the first draft of Mudrooroo’s script was overly didactic and that the characters came across as two-dimensional. Several of Mudrooroo’s characters are stereotypical Aboriginal types, such as Bob, an

activist, and King George, an elderly alcoholic. He also includes an Aboriginal academic and a legal worker to show success within the Aboriginal community. However, while Mudrooroo incorporates a wide array of character types into the text, they are all stereotypes based on their professions. Fischer did not feel that the second draft improved on this problem and also worried about the uneven transitions between the Mudrooroo's frame and *Der Auftrag* (*Mudrooroo* 16-17). Despite his concerns, the second draft was used in workshops of the play, which took place over two weeks and led up to a staged reading on 14 October 1991.

During the workshop process Fischer encountered many dramaturgical challenges, the primary one being a lack of knowledge about Müller and non-naturalistic theatre in Australia. Although he discussed Müller with the actors, Fischer was still concerned that the playwright was practically unknown to Australian audiences. Fischer also worried that *Der Auftrag* was too serious and would “[fit] in exactly with the stereotypes people have of a *Teutonic* theatre: boring, political, didactic, anything but entertaining” (*Mudrooroo* 13). This concern was not aided by Mudrooroo's frame in which both Müller and *Der Auftrag* were essentialized through the inclusion of German bashing and anti-German stereotypes (126). One example is when Maryanne, a medical worker, refuses to play the part of a woman who she feels is treated badly in Müller's text. She argues that she and the other female actor, Eve, are “not the sort to be passive and victims of men, even if German women are like that” (*Mudrooroo*, “Aboriginal” 86). This issue was not fully solved as the majority of the workshop time was spent working on the frame, and not the relationship between the frame

and *Der Auftrag*. At the reading, Fischer's concerns were confirmed as the audience responded positively to the political statements made in the frame, but seemed confused by the inclusion of the Müller text (Fischer, *Mudrooroo* 127-130). Another dramaturgical issue during the workshops was Fischer's problematic position as a white man in an otherwise all-Aboriginal company. By the end of the process, Fischer felt as if he was being treated as the Other alongside Müller (127). This feeling was partly a reaction to the direction *Mudrooroo's* text took. By denying the connection between Müller and the Aboriginals, *Mudrooroo* turns Fischer's initial concept around and, according to Gerry Turcotte, "reverses the polarity – it is Fischer who cannot participate" (189).

Unlike *Scheherazade Goes West* and *Gulliver's Choice*, *Mudrooroo's* text was produced in full, directed by Aboriginal director Noel Tovey and with dramaturgy by Fischer. However, *Mudrooroo* was not a part of this process as he refused any further involvement after the workshop (Fischer, "Performing" 224). Renamed *The Aboriginal Protesters*, this production premiered at the Sydney Festival in January 1996 before travelling to Germany for Weimar's *Kunstfest* and the *Festival der Kulturen* in Munich (Garde, "That Bit" 102). While he continues to write extensively about *Mudrooroo's* text and the workshop process, Fischer has revealed little about the process behind the full production. Although the order of some scenes was changed for *The Aboriginal Protesters*, the bulk of the script appears to have been used as *Mudrooroo* intended. Tovey and Fischer likely collaborated on the few script changes that were made (Hamilton; Garde, *Brecht*

353); however, as Tovey's stated aim in directing the production was to create a new theatre with a clear Aboriginal voice, the extent of Fischer's role is questionable (Garde, "That Bit" 107).

While Fischer has written little about his experience as the production dramaturg of *The Aboriginal Protesters*, the reception of the work in both Australia and Germany reveals that some of the dramaturgical issues from the workshop were never solved. In Australia, the reviewer for the *Sydney Morning Herald*, Angela Bennie, writes excitedly about the Aboriginals' passion, yet questions why they turned to Müller by asking "What has Muller [sic], with his tortured, fractured dialectics - and his dark metaphors - to do with them?" ("Emotion"). Several other reviewers, including Patrick Nolan of the *Sydney Review* and Helen Thomson of *The Age*, also note the lack of clear connection between the frame and the Müller text. Additionally, there is confusion as to whether Müller is meant to represent an oppressive European theatre tradition. Angela Bennie links the use of a proscenium stage to his "high, theatrical discourse with heightened posture and gesture" ("Call") while Nolan thinks this design choice clashes with Müller's non-traditional aesthetics. Several reviews, including those by Stewart Hawkins in the *Daily Telegraph* and Paul McGillick in the *Australian Financial Review*, criticize the overly didactic and two-dimensional script, but praise Tovey's direction. Both Nolan and John McCallum of the *Australian* note that Mudrooroo, while he has powerful ideas, is not much of a playwright. In Germany, reviewers have similar critiques, including finding the script too didactic and not understanding why the connection to Müller had

been made. Ernst Schumacher, a critic and a friend of Müller's, suggests that "[the Aboriginals] should forget about Muller [sic] and just do their own" (qtd. in Bennie, "Emotion"). In general, German critics focused on the Aboriginal aspects of the production, which were foreign to them, rather than the Müller text.

In his own assessments of this process, Fischer describes the relationship between the German and Australian aspects of the production as intercultural. This intercultural relationship, which extends from the texts used to Fischer's interactions with his Aboriginal collaborators, has led to both criticism and praise for the project. While he was a constant advocate for the project, Fischer's position as a non-Aboriginal attempting to create a new type of Aboriginal theatre is potentially problematic. Gerry Turcotte claims that over the course of the project "Fischer does not appear to be aware of the resonant ironies which his own role involves, nor of the overdeterministic nature of his own vision" (185). Helen Gilbert agrees with Turcotte's assessment; however, she notes that the workshop process relegated Fischer to a less powerful position and thus allowed the Aboriginals to take ownership of the script (*Sightlines* 10). She also believes that the full production "[consolidated] Aboriginal ownership" over the piece ("Reconciliation" 87). Hans-Thies Lehmann comes to a similar conclusion in his assessment of Tovey's production. He claims the characters' rejection of *Der Auftrag* problematizes interculturalism by questioning whether a cross-cultural relationship between Müller and the Aboriginals is even possible (177-78). Reflexively staging this rejection of Müller's work is an intriguing exercise.

However, the focus on this unproductive intercultural relationship supplants Fischer's original desire to create a new form of Aboriginal theatre.

In his role as dramaturg, Fischer became the proxy for Müller, who in turn was treated as a proxy for all European oppression. By keeping the relationship between Müller and the Aboriginals - and thus European and Australian cultures - static, the production could not move from an intercultural to a transcultural product. Instead, it fell victim to many problems common to intercultural theatre, including creating binaries and depending on fundamental beliefs about the differences between cultures (Pavis, *Dictionary* 85). Defined by Diana Taylor as "the transformative process undergone by a society in the acquisition or imposition of foreign material, and the fusion of the indigenous and the foreign to create a new, original cultural product" (*Archive*, 94), transculturation results in a form of theatre that embraces the complexities of cultural interactions.

Transcultural theatre recognizes the postcolonial argument that cultures are not homogenous, but rather depend upon constant interactions that destroy the notion of purity (Bhabha 52). In the case of *The Aboriginal Protesters*, the possibility for a transcultural product was hindered by Fischer's concept, which was created without any Aboriginal input. Although the project was able to move forward, this initial dramaturgical decision impeded its theatrical potential.

Mudrooroo's essentializing of *Der Auftrag* is an additional problematic aspect of the project. Rather than viewing Müller within his socio-historic context, Mudrooroo makes Müller into a prototypical colonizer with no genuine interest in those who have been colonized. In reality, Müller was aware of his

problematic role as a white, European intellectual attempting to write about the revolution. In order to avoid essentializing the Other, he focuses his play on Debuisson's betrayal, and by proxy the betrayal of the Third World by the First (Bathrick, *Powers* 145). In Müller's text, this betrayal is primarily shown through the actions of Debuisson, who cannot fully commit to the revolutionary cause. Near the end of the play, Debuisson reveals the depth of his hatred for their cause by claiming:

Now I want to sit where people are laughing, free to do anything that's to my taste, equal with myself, my own and no one else's brother. Your hide will remain black, Sasportas. You, Galloudec, will remain a peasant. They will laugh about you. My place is where they laugh about you. I laugh about you. I laugh about the negro. I laugh about the peasant. I laugh about the negro who wants to wash himself white with freedom. I laugh about the peasant who walks about in the mask of equality. (59)

In Müller's text, the surreal passage that follows a nameless party functionary on a mission also reflects this betrayal. When he finds himself lost in a Peruvian village, the man notes the sense of poverty and despair in the air. Locals stand under a billboard that advertises products from abroad and a dog runs around with a hand in its mouth. Near the end of the passage, the man notices two boys "working on something that is a cross between a steam engine and a locomotive standing on broken tracks." As he watches them work, the man thinks "As a European I see at a glance that their labour is lost: this vehicle is not going to

move, but I don't tell the children, work is hope, and I continue walking into the landscape that has no other work but to wait for the disappearance of humanity” (55). Tony Kushner argues that this active identification with the oppressor rather than the victim is precisely what makes Müller a powerful playwright (xv). However, Mudrooroo ignores this aspect of *Der Auftrag* as he aims to create a simple and didactic piece.

While Fischer's writings about the project are relatively easy to access, obtaining a recording of the Tovey production has proved unfeasible. This obstacle, along with the focus of critical discourse on problems inherent in Mudrooroo's text rather than the performance itself, makes the production difficult to analyse at length. Instead, I have chosen to focus on a non-textual adaptation in order to avoid the inherent problems that come with dramatizing Müller. Müller himself believed that a “theatre text [is] only good if it was unstageable for the theatre as it is” (qtd. in Lehmann 50) – thus putting the onus onto those staging his works. One production that stages Müller without adapting his text first is *Máquina Hamlet*, a production of *Hamletmachine* first produced in 1995 by Argentinean theatre company El Periférico de Objetos. Unlike *The Aboriginal Protesters*, there is a plethora of material on El Periférico de Objetos' production. As *Máquina Hamlet* was performed in Latin America, North America and Europe over the course of several years, critical articles and reviews of the show are available in several languages, including English and Spanish, which are both accessible to me. As an example, *Máquina Hamlet* is compelling because of the way it links Müller not only to the political history of Argentina, but also to

the history of violence in the world. In direct contrast to *The Aboriginal Protesters*, El Periférico de Objetos' production does not try to dramatize Müller, but rather explodes his work critically. By doing this, they interact with Müller in a way that mirrors his own treatment of his predecessors. The company also keeps Müller's work intentionally ambiguous, which places audience reception at the forefront of the production of meaning.

Chapter Two: El Periférico de Objetos' *Máquina Hamlet*

El Periférico de Objetos

The members of El Periférico de Objetos [PDO] met at Buenos Aires' *Escuela de Titiriteros del San Martín* where they were all studying puppetry under Ariel Bufano (Propato, "El Significado" 6). While the individual members have diverse backgrounds ranging from carpentry to visual arts, founding members Ana Alvarado, Emilio García Wehbi, Daniel Veronese and Paula Nátoli shared a mutual interest in exploring object theatre. With this goal in mind, the four formed PDO in February 1989. The company has worked under the same artistic team for over twenty years, minus Nátoli who left the group in 1992 for personal reasons (7-8). Alvarado defines the group's main aesthetic goal as the creation of new forms of object theatre. This exploration involves questioning the relationship between objects and their manipulators in order to interrogate issues such as terror and power ("Autorretrato" 36).

Apart from *Máquina Hamlet*, the company has performed four shows together, including an adaptation of Alfred Jarry's *King Ubu* and productions of new plays written by Veronese. Each of these productions involves several key elements that inform PDO's ongoing aesthetic exploration. These include the use of pastiche, dolls of many different sizes, projections, multiple playing spaces, screens, and dull colours. While the company works with all of these elements, their major focus is on creating a theatre of objects with their puppet-dolls, which are usually made of either a hard type of plastic or porcelain. Although a few have

holes in their heads to facilitate manipulation, most of the objects do not look like they have been created in order to be manipulated; instead, they appear more akin to department store mannequins and children's toys. The puppet-dolls, although made specifically for the productions, seem worn through age and use, fitting the description of a "real object" as described by one of the group's main influences, Polish theatre director Tadeusz Kantor. According to Kantor, using worn and plain looking objects allows theatre artists to "[disclose] the object's deeply hidden object-ness. Bereft of its externalities, the object reveal[s] its 'essence.' Its primordial function" ("Annexed" 74).

The members of PDO, who often cite Kantor in their self-reflexive writings, aim to explore not only the "essence" and functionality of the object, but also the nature of the object-performer relationship. The name 'El Periférico de Objetos' literally translates to "The Peripheral of Objects"; however, for the company, the idea of the "peripheral" is not something on the outside, but rather a space of in-between-ness. Veronese explains the name as being the space in which the company works, located between live human actors and the human-like objects they work with (Dubatti, "Micropoéticas" 42). The members of PDO have worked extensively with different forms of physical performance. Their physical awareness allows them to integrate themselves with their objects so that the puppeteer is not seen as a manipulator, but rather as an integral part of the object. While the performers become object-like, the puppet-dolls in turn become extensions of the performers. This synthesis between performers and puppets is part of PDO's larger goal of de-hierarchizing theatrical elements, a technique

initiated through Kantor's use of objects and now widely common in postdramatic theatre practice (Lehmann 73, 86). Ana Durán, who has seen several of PDO's shows, notes that this integration does not stop with the performer and object, but extends to the non-hierarchical status of all other elements, including lighting, music, costuming and movement. PDO's techniques for de-hierarchization include using soundscapes that both highlight and inform movement, and having set pieces that the performers interact with and transform into new arrangements.

Integrating performers and objects allows PDO to explore what Veronese refers to as the main theme or "essence of the group" (qtd. in Arpes): violence. In all of their shows, the performers make objects appear to be alive before violently destroying them. This aspect of their puppetry goes beyond what can be done to a human actor onstage. The company also integrates violence into their work through sound and other forms of multimedia. As a spectator at many PDO productions, Óscar Cornago believes "el tema de la muerte, la violencia, el suicidio, la tortura y el poder sigan siendo los ejes obsesivos sobre la que gira su producción."¹ The extremely violent nature of their productions allows the company to surprise and shock their audiences by playing against their horizon of expectations. The company believes that by destroying these expectations and exposing the spectators to violent images, they can simultaneously affect audiences at physical and mental levels (Veronese, "El Periférico"). When exposing audiences to images of violence, PDO does not shy away from mentally

¹ "The themes of death, violence, suicide, torture and power continue to be key aspects upon which they create productions."

exhausting their spectators. According to García Wehbi, “We don't think theater is entertainment. We want it to be work for our audience” (qtd. in Spabler).

Alvarado and Veronese situate PDO as part of an aesthetically violent and socially aware Argentinean theatre movement stemming from the work of Griselda Gambaro and Eduardo Pavlovsky. They also cite many European theatre artists as inspirations. Apart from Kantor, these theatre makers include Peter Brook, Heiner Müller, Romeo Castellucci and Eimuntas Nekrošius (Alvarado, “Autorretrato” 37-42). Contemporary European theatre practice not only influences the themes and aesthetic choices of the company, but also the process PDO undergoes when building a production. Rehearsals occur over the course of about six months, during which the actors work collaboratively with company members frequently sharing the role of director. The creative process usually starts with a plethora of written material and visual ideas, which PDO then pares down to a more concentrated and intense show lasting less than seventy minutes (Cornago). The influence of European theatre makers has also affected the type of product the company makes and their relationship with their audience. According to Veronese, PDO trusts its audience to think for themselves as “No queremos un teatro de respuestas, queremos plasmar nuestras propias contradicciones y mostrar algo que la gente no quiere ver, lo inesperado”² (qtd. in Ramos). Alvarado notes that the members of PDO also engage critically with writers and visual artists including Gilles Deleuze, Walter Benjamin, Marcel Duchamp, Joseph Beuys,

² “We don't want a theatre of answers. We want to express our own contradictions and show things that people do not necessarily want to see, something unexpected.”

Diane Arbus, Cindy Sherman and William Kentridge (“Autorretrato” 37, 42). Many of these influences are evident in the company’s production of Müller’s *Hamletmachine*, produced in 1995 under the literally translated title *Máquina Hamlet*.

El Periférico de Objetos’ *Máquina Hamlet*

El Periférico de Objetos decided to work on Müller’s text after toying with the idea of creating their own adaptation of *Hamlet*. By choosing to perform a play by a European, rather than a Latin American, playwright, PDO fulfilled their desire to work with someone considered a “peripheral author” in Argentina. This allowed PDO to, in the words of Veronese, “see the theatre from another place” (qtd. in Dubatti, “Micropoéticas” 42). They decided against creating their own text because they felt Müller’s *Hamletmachine* addressed many of the reasons they were interested in *Hamlet* in the first place. Müller’s text also relates to several areas of their ongoing aesthetic exploration, including intellectually assaulting spectators, questioning the role of the artist and playing with verbal language. Although Veronese emphasises that the company chose *Hamletmachine* because of their aesthetic goals, he also recognizes that Müller’s work aligns with PDO’s political views (“Periférico” 32).

While Argentina’s Dirty War finished when the country’s military junta left power in 1983, the specter of this era remains. To this day, news organizations continue to carry stories about ongoing legal cases against military men and the discovery of bodies of the disappeared. The Dirty War was explored

through art in the 1980s; however, by the 1990s the Argentinean government was officially supporting a policy of collective forgetting. This policy began with 1987's Law of Due Obedience, which dropped charges against all non-commanding officers for any crimes committed during the Dirty War. This act was followed by presidential pardons in 1989 and 1990. On these two separate occasions, President Carlos Menem, bogged down by a failing economy and under threat of a military coup, pardoned senior military men accused of torturing and murdering thousands of civilians (Robben 336-7). Regarding this act, Menem explained, "Argentina lived through a dirty war, but the war is over. The pardons will definitely close a sad and black stage of Argentinean history" (qtd. in Taylor, *Disappearing* 14). It was not until five years later, in 1995 - the year *Máquina Hamlet* was produced - that a senior member of the military, Captain Adolfo Francisco Scilingo, openly discussed the actions of the army during the Dirty War. Although technically still under the policy of "communal forgetting," Argentineans were beginning to dialogue about the Dirty War and admit how the specter of the past was present in their daily lives (Robben 341; Taylor, *Disappearing* 16). It was within this context that PDO began working with Müller's *Hamletmachine*, a text that also deals with the omnipresence of history in western civilization. While PDO's process and aesthetic choices link their production of *Hamletmachine* to both local and global politics, the majority of the production's political ramifications will be discussed at the conclusion of the chapter.

Once they chose to work on *Hamletmachine*, the company enlisted the help of a German dramaturg, Dieter Welke. According to Veronese, Welke worked with PDO for fifteen days at the beginning of the process and then returned for a few days at the end of rehearsals (“El Periférico”). Welke also worked with the Program Director of Argentina’s *Goethe Institut*, Gabriela Massuh, to examine the two existing Argentinean translations of *Hamletmachine* and then create a new version specifically for PDO’s production (Durán). PDO’s production of *Máquina Hamlet* premiered at Buenos Aires’ *Teatro San Martín*, also known as the *Callejón de los Deseos*, in 1995. After playing for five years, it went on to tour internationally to Europe and North America. Directed by the three members of PDO, *Máquina Hamlet* includes many of PDO’s common visual choices, including the use of both live actors (originally Alvarado, Wehbi, Román Lamas and Alejandro Tantanián) and puppet-doll objects of various sizes.

My analysis of the production is based on the video recording available at New York Public Library’s Theatre on Film and Tape Archive. This tape was filmed on 21 October 2000 at New York’s Brooklyn Academy of Music. The performers at this time were Felicitas Luna, Jorge Onofri, Alejandro Tantanián and Emilio García Wehbi. Other credits include: Lighting Design by Jorge Doliszniak, Marionette/Object Design by Norberto Laino, Sound Design by Cecilia Candia and Costume Design by Rosana Barcena. In the performance, the full text of *Hamletmachine* – including stage directions - is heard as a recorded voiceover interspersed with dirges, organ music and military songs. The text is entirely in Spanish save for German scene titles and English lines kept from the

original. Other than the puppet-dolls, there are few objects onstage, creating a sparse atmosphere. The four performers, three female and one male, are young, Caucasian and dark haired. The males wear dark pants tucked into military boots and black tuxedo jackets, which – along with their similar physical features and stature – makes it difficult to distinguish between the three. The female performer also wears this costume at the beginning of the show and is indistinguishable from the other three. However, she changes into a red dress for the latter half of the play. The four performers spend the majority of their onstage time manipulating objects of different sizes. All of the objects resemble humans and have light skin colours. The objects are made from a variety of materials, including plastic, latex, porcelain and wood. The largest objects are human-sized mannequins who wear similar costumes to the performers (Figure 1). Some of these mannequins resemble rag dolls, as they are limp without manipulation by the performers. These mannequins are usually manipulated by at least two performers with one holding the torso while the other manipulates the limbs. Other mannequins are able to stand on their own and are on wheels so that one performer can easily manipulate them. One mannequin that differs from the rest has a human-sized head, but a body smaller than that of a human. It is also on rollers, which lets the performers dance with it (Figure 4). PDO's smaller objects include dolls with holes in their heads. This design allows for easy manipulation as the performers can insert their hand into the dolls' heads to move them (Figures 2, 3 and 16). The smallest objects used appear near the end of the production on a small puppet

stage. In this puppet show, headless Barbie and Ken dolls are used to recreate scenes already performed with the larger objects (Figure 8).



Figure 1. The cast of *Máquina Hamlet* with several of the mannequins and dolls.



Figure 2. A male performer manipulating a doll by placing his hand in its hollowed out head.

Defining Intermediality

By relying on these very few types of non-digital media in their performance, PDO creates an intermedial performance that responds to and informs a contemporary mode of perception, and relies on the spectator as the center for meaning making. The importance of the audience in PDO's production relates to Meike Wagner's definition of intermediality as a matrix that produces bodies onstage through the exchange between audience members, performers, and perceptions of the body and the material objects. Instead of being a decoder of signs in a traditional semiotic structure, the spectator partakes in the creation process as a "corporeally involved perceiver" (Wagner 128). When discussing intermediality this corporeal involvement is not separate from the mind in the Cartesian sense. Rather, the term 'body' includes the inseparable mind and body processes of the contemporary subject. One of the ways PDO provokes the body of its spectators is through the intermedial gap between the performer and puppet. This gap, along with other intermedial elements, activates the audience by staging the contemporary construction of a subject through intersubjective and collaborative relations. In order to assess PDO's use of intermediality, the link between technology, media and the role of spectators needs to be explored.

Philip Auslander argues that perception in the theatre is inevitably affected by the pervasiveness of digital culture in the western hemisphere (43). As we are constantly surrounded by and interacting with various types of media in our daily lives, the ways we perceive, and consequently our subject positions, are continually in flux. The body is affected by this interaction as technology is

increasingly being highlighted as an extension of the body. Auslander explains that mass media has become so prevalent in society that it is impossible to think of the theatre as being isolated ontologically or culturally from the way we see the world everyday (45). Matthew Causey agrees that, in order to explore how performance has been altered by technology, theatre must be viewed as a medium which is never isolated. Rather, it is completely integrated with other media by sharing aspects of them, and even becoming a part of them or allowing them to become an integral part of theatre (8). This influence of contemporary perception on performance leads to the concept of intermediality. At its base level, Freda Chapple and Chiel Kattenbelt define intermediality as the integration of digital technology and non-theatre media in a performance space and the resulting new forms of representation (11). However, Chapple and Kattenbelt also believe that intermediality, while linked to technology and its place in society, can occur in a staging that does not use any modern or contemporary technology. This concept opens up the definition of intermediality to be “about changes in theatre practice and thus about changing perceptions of performance, which become visible through the process of staging” (12).

While using various contemporary technologies onstage can reflect the simultaneity inherent in contemporary life, choosing to work without these technologies is still a reflection of and response to contemporary digital culture. Günter Berghaus notes that in the 1980s and 1990s artistic responses to technology resulted in two extremes: neo-Futurism and neo-Primitivism. While neo-Futurists were optimistic about the integration of technology into society and

neo-Primitivists were not, both were responding to the increasing speed of technology and the effects of new advances on society.³ Rather than the technology itself, the infiltration of a contemporary digitized perception can lead to an intermedial performance. This is just one aspect of intermediality and relates to what Jens Schröter, in his definition of four types of intermediality, terms ontological intermediality, or when a medium is understood in relation to other media (Chapple and Kattenbelt 13). Rather than depending on the use of technology onstage, in this case intermediality refers to the relationship between the staging and the way we see the world (21). Ontological intermediality is a phenomenological approach to the concept as intermediality is viewed as a type of indeterminacy. When literary works represent objects as indeterminate or, as defined by Robert C. Holub, “between aspects of dimensions” (562), the center for meaning making is placed on the reader who has to fill in the blanks, or gaps, in the text. This active meaning making relies on a phenomenological approach that eludes any singular definitive interpretation. Peter M Boenisch has a similar definition of intermediality as not only the use of digital technology alongside performers’ live bodies, but as “an effect created in the perception of observers that is triggered by performance” (113). When examining aspects of postdramatic theatre, Hans-Thies Lehmann also discusses the way technology affects perception. Lehmann contextualizes postdramatic theatre as a product of abundant

³ Discussions of low tech or minimalist productions as a reflection of a digitized culture are also found in Auslander 36; Lehmann 90; Aronson “Theatre” 3; and Boenisch 114. Patrice Pavis notes that this is not a new phenomenon as, according to Uwe Richterich, Meyerhold responded to a filmic gaze by using cinematic techniques in his aesthetics both when he used screens and when he did not (*Analyzing*, 50).

mediatization and the resulting disconnect between the communication and reception of signs. Postdramatic theatre works to reveal this state through what Lehmann calls a “*politics of perception*,” which “can move the *mutual implication of actors and spectators in the theatrical production of images* into the centre and thus make visible the broken thread between personal experience and perception” (186).

Contemporary modes of perception, and the ways they inform and mark individuals, are intricately linked to intersubjectivity. In twentieth-century critical thought, there was a shift from understanding the formation of the subject as subjective to intersubjective. In theatre, Matthew Causey describes the meeting of digital and live bodies onstage as uncanny, which leads to what he calls a “split subjectivity” in the Lacanian sense. This split subjectivity emphasizes the interaction between a screen and a human body, in which the televisual:

replicates, distorts and restores. It traps the gaze. It shows our nothingness. Yet, this is not the site of pure negativity, as the technological uncanny triggers the visitation of the other (in the guise of death) but is the ground upon where we dance the double in a renewal of being beyond the ego-centered and solidified subject. (Causey 390)

Thus, the idea of a single subjectivity is shattered as, through the double’s image, one’s own mortality is emphasized. However, intermedial performance – whether using digital technologies or not - can move beyond a split subjectivity and into

intersubjective relations which do not rely on this binary between live and digital bodies.

N. Katherine Hayles believes digital technology does not simply change single subjects, but is rather altering how subjectivity works, as the virtual subject is formed through interaction with digital technology. This interaction creates a cyborg subject whose body is “extended or disrupted” through this relationship (qtd. in Saltz 73). Thus, bodies can no longer be defined as an unmediated entity, but are rather constantly in contact with other media – including other people - and technologies. This constant relationship reflects Mario J. Valdés’ definition of intersubjectivity as the “escape from the confines of subjectivism through language to a process of communicative interaction.” This interaction is a phenomenological process as meaning relies on the individual’s own context, which has been formed through relationships with others. Phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty extends the idea of the subject formed through language by defining “*inter-subjectivity* as dramatically *inter-corporeal*” (Wagner 128). In the theatre, bodies are defined by this inter-relationship between performers, spectators and other media. David Z Saltz names this intersubjective subject position as collaborative. He claims technology bridges gaps between subjects and creates a collaborative subject “not anchored firmly in any pre-existing, individual subjectivity. Rather, it relies on the contributions of multiple subjects to synthesize a single virtual subject” (75). While not always reliant on the material existence of digital technology, postdramatic theatre also depends on intersubjective relations for the creation of meaning. In this type of performance,

according to Lehmann, “Theatre becomes a ‘social situation’ in which the spectator realizes that what s/he experiences depends not just on him/herself but also on others” (107). A multiplicity of perceiving subjects relates to Boenisch’s belief that intermediality can act to disturb and challenge meaning making by offering multiple points of view (115). This explosion of meaning making and reliance on social interaction can have political repercussions – a topic which will be addressed later in this chapter through the example of *Máquina Hamlet*.

Intermediality in *Máquina Hamlet*

In *Máquina Hamlet*, various media are used to emphasize and speak to current modes of perception and their effects on the body. The production is most clearly intermedial through the use of object theatre as the performers interact with the dolls and mannequins as extensions of themselves. Such integration challenges the nineteenth-century suggestion of Heinrich von Kleist that marionettes are not affected, and therefore are ontologically different from human actors. In his essay, “On the Marionette Theatre,” Kleist states, “it would be almost impossible for a man to attain even an approximation of a mechanical being” (24). However, in PDO’s production, the interaction between puppeteer and puppet highlights an intermedial space, as the puppet-dolls exist between the machine and the body –the object and the subject – both of which can be considered media in their own right. Günter Berghaus argues that when video images are put onstage simultaneously with live bodies, the audience is encouraged to think critically about the relationship between the two (184). A

similar process occurs when viewing the integration of live and mediatized bodies in puppetry. In his article “Puppetry and the Destruction of the Object,” Matthew Isaac Cohen notes that puppets “are alien others *and* closely associated with the person. They are ‘not me’ and also ‘not not me’” (124). Veronese affirms that this is one of the reasons PDO is interested in object work. He believes objects exist in a space between machine and man – a space that does not necessarily show these two sides as binaries, but rather one which can exist with both aspects working simultaneously (Castillo 63). When the materiality of the puppet is emphasized, this duality becomes particularly clear. It is also at this moment that the spectator can potentially be disturbed, as their own sense of what constitutes a body is challenged.

In *Máquina Hamlet*, even though low lighting is used in Jorge Doliszniak’s design, the manipulation of the puppet-object is usually fully visible. At the beginning of the show, when smaller marionettes are used, the operation of the objects is especially noticeable, as the puppet-objects have hollowed out heads that the performers grab onto in order to manipulate them. Throughout the show, the inclusion of life-sized mannequins makes this in-between space less visible as the objects look more human-like and approximate the size of human bodies. This aesthetic choice reflects the ongoing influence Kantor has on PDO’s work. He began using mannequins to explore life through death because, in his opinion, “[The mannequin’s] appearance complies with my ever-deepening conviction that it is possible to express *life* in art only through the *absence of life*, through an appeal to DEATH” (“Theatre” 112). In her article on PDO’s *Máquina Hamlet*,

Meike Wagner links the materiality and simultaneous liveness of the puppet with the paradox of human existence. She argues that when the line between these two states becomes indistinct, the relationship between life and death is blurred for the spectator. Alvarado expresses how this integration works: “Uno puede prolongar su cuerpo en el objeto, que busca verse vivo. O verse muerto, pero porque ha vivido antes”⁴ (qtd. in Perasso). It is this blurring between puppet and performers – and thus live/dead and live/mediatized – that makes puppetry intermedial.

Throughout the production this in-between space, and the blurring it creates, is emphasized through the immaculate integration and interchangeability of the performers and objects. Wagner notes that in the opening beat of the ‘Family Scrapbook’ the life-size mannequins and the actors are intermingled and impossible to tell apart. The performers are so still that she believes the image could be showing live or dead bodies (125). Throughout the performance, this blurring between live and dead is highlighted. Another example from the opening scene occurs when one puppet lies in a tabernacle, which acts as a coffin until a live performer brings the object to life. The integration of the performers and objects is so extensive that the only time the number of live bodies onstage can be clearly assessed is during the curtain call. The emergence of only four live bodies at the end is disturbing as the action throughout involves many more bodies and seems impossible to have been manipulated by such a small cast.

The use of violence in the production also plays with the gap between the performer and object bodies. The live performers both caress and love the

⁴ “One can extend their body with the object, which they want to see as alive. Or they can see it as dead, but because it was alive before.”

puppets, and reject and destroy them at various points – sometimes simultaneously. As the performers are both the instigators and receivers of the pain, the ambiguity of the performer-object relationship becomes prominent. Again, Cohen notes that this is an inherent aspect of puppetry and part of the reason this form is frequently used to interrogate the role of violence in society (126-7). Beatriz Trastoy’s response to the production reveals the effectiveness of this intermedial interaction. She recognizes the potential of working with the in-between and describes the production as “un teatro de pesadilla en el que el horror se instala en el preciso espacio que media entre el cuerpo de los manipuladores y el de los muñecos, entre la imagen y la palabra, entre lo que vemos y lo que adivinamos, entre el escenario y la platea.”⁵ The horror in the in-between is clearly emphasized through the violence at the end of the performance, when parts of the show are re-enacted on a miniature stage with smaller puppets than originally used. This iteration widens the gap between the subject and object by using greater proximity in size between the body of the performer and the puppet. This re-enactment also emphasizes perception through a postdramatic aesthetic of repetition in which, according to Lehmann, “repetition is also capable of producing a new attention punctuated by the memory of the preceding events, *an attending to the little differences*. It is not about the significance of the repeated events but about the significance of repeated perception, not about the repeated but about repetition itself” (157). By repeating the action with a

⁵ “a theatre of nightmares in which the horror exists in the precise space that mediates between the bodies of the manipulators and the dolls, between the images and the words, between what we see and what we suppose, between the stage and the audience”

difference, the original perception of these events is challenged. The difference in the repetitions is most clear when a small puppet – about the size of a hand – is shot with a gun. Both iterations of this action occur when there is no voiceover. While the earlier image of a life-sized puppet being shot was disturbing, the difference in sizes make the second image appear more violent and oppressive. A similar moment occurs when the lighting of a cigarette is repeated on the puppet stage. While in the first iteration the cigarette was lit by one human performer for another, when restaged with a human performer trying to light the cigarette of a small marionette the act becomes violent. The marionette, which is being manipulated by another performer, is afraid of the fire and shakes with fear before running away. While the first iteration of these scenes is performed with more human-like objects, the puppet show's small size actually makes it potentially more disturbing. This repetition with difference highlights the way we constantly perceive and re-perceive acts of violence and trauma in a contemporary mediatized world and how mediatized representation involves a constant zooming in and out.

Máquina Hamlet: Emphasizing the Uncanny

The link between the objects and death is heightened by the uncanny-ness of the dolls and mannequins. Linked to nostalgia and the role of human-like objects in society, this uncanny, according to Sigmund Freud “is in reality nothing new or foreign, but something familiar and old” (166). PDO's use of human-like objects reflects Freud's discussion of the uncanny-ness of the double - or images

made in one's likeness. In writing about the uncanny, Freud explains that this "double" was "originally an insurance against destruction to the ego" as it created a space by which someone can experience him or herself as other. However, this same image can "become a vision of terror" and "the ghastly harbinger of death" through its uncanny-ness (162-3). Cohen connects the uncanny-ness of the double to the world of puppetry by noting that puppets "are simultaneously objects of veneration, awe and sometimes fear that occupy a potential space between the world of imagination and the world of actuality" (123). This sense of uncanny is an intentional result of PDO's aesthetic explorations. Both in interviews and their own writings, the members of PDO continually refer to the "*siniestro*," or "uncanny," which exists when an object seems to have a life of its own even when its manipulator is visible. Veronese describes this aspect of their work:

uno ve que el objeto en realidad está movido, pero por momentos cree que está vivo y eso produce una sensación siniestra. Un objeto inexplicable, escandaloso y perturbador, que por momentos está muerto y por momentos cobra vida. Invadimos algo que nos permitió entrar en otro terreno, que es el montaje del espacio corporal del actor con el espacio corporal del objeto. Hay una zona entre los dos cuerpos que no tiene representatividad en la cotidianeidad. Cuando esta relación está vivida como real, como

posible, es cuando se produce esta ambigüedad, esta magia. (qtd. in Ramos)⁶

The uncanny-ness of the objects is also extended through the puppet show at the end as the smaller versions of the initial marionettes become endless simulacra which emphasize the gap between the body of the performer and the seemingly alive body of the puppet.

Other elements of the production heighten the sense of the uncanny through a feeling of nostalgia. Production choices include the use of distant synthesized music, low lighting, a lack of colour and a slideshow. The technique of slowness throughout the production adds to the uncanny-ness of perception and emphasizes the repetition of various actions throughout the piece. Slowness and repetition are complimentary techniques that highlight particular moments for the audience. Moments of slowness, such as the prolonged pulling of a tabernacle across a table, are also repeated in the smaller puppet show at the end. The use of these techniques is not new for PDO, as Alvarado believes two key aspects of their productions are “Repetition. Slowness” (“Autorretrato” 43). Like the company’s use of minimalism, this strategy relates to the postdramatic theatre, in which both high speeds and “durational aesthetic[s]” are viewed as responses to the mediatization of society (Lehmann 156). In contemporary life, digital media

⁶ “you can see that the object is really being moved, but sometimes you still believe that it is alive, and this creates an uncanny feeling. It is an inexplicable, shocking and disturbing object, which is sometimes dead and at other times brought to life. We enter upon something that we are not permitted to enter into in other places - the linking of the corporeal space of the actor with the corporeal space of the object. The zone between the two bodies does not have a quotidian equivalent. When this connection is alive it appears to be both real and full of possibility. This is when ambiguity and magic is produced.”

hosts a constant news cycle that works at an increasingly rapid speed. The speed with which information travels has a direct impact on the way we perceive the world. This perception can be highlighted through both fast paced actions that attempt to mirror the speed of communication and slowed down actions, which emphasize how we no longer perceive the world in quotidian existence. PDO's aesthetic of slowness, which leads to a general sense of stillness, is especially prominent during the previously mentioned episode in the 'Family Scrapbook' in which the performers move and show themselves to be different from the immobile mannequins. This action is extremely protracted, which makes the realization that there are both humans and objects onstage occur slowly. Lehmann defines this type of aesthetic as existing in an in-between time using a puppet-theatre analogy. He states that a 'theatre of slowness' "[has] a time of its own – midway between the achronia of a machine and the traceable and palpable lifetime of human actors, who attain here the gracefulness of marionette theatre" (156). This slowness emphasizes the careful manipulation of the objects and thus highlights the gap between the human and object bodies. This aesthetic choice reflects the slowness and lack of definitive action in the *Hamletmachine* text. Like Shakespeare's Hamlet, Müller's Actor Playing Hamlet does not want to perform his role anymore. Instead, he claims "My drama didn't happen. The script has been lost. The actors put their faces on the rack in the dressing room. In his box, the prompter is rotting. The stuffed corpses in the house don't stir a hand. I go home and kill the time, at one/with my undivided self" (56).

(Inter)Subjectivity in *Máquina Hamlet*

The uncanny nature of this intermedial performance affects the subjectivity of all bodies in the playing space. When attempting to define whether the puppets are live or object bodies, Wagner observes that in the performance “all appearances are transformed into cyborgs – half mediatized technological objects, half-animated agents of human flesh and blood” (126). These bodies are constantly not only in-between subject and object, but in fact, through this interaction, become virtual entities. Rather than being separated, medial copies that work against some “*original corporeality* (natural human flesh)” (Wagner 127), the objects are informed by a collaborative subjectivity. When defining the collaborative virtual subject, David Z Saltz claims the cyborg onstage - which is “the uncanny image of machine and flesh merging into a single organism” – allows audiences to view everyday objects “as cyborg extensions of ourselves” (81). In *Máquina Hamlet*, the uncanny brought forth by the performer-object relationship is extended onto the spectator whose own sense of their body is destabilized. The puppeteers and objects, and the spectators as active witnesses to this interaction, exist as a network of relations that affects the formation of a subject. While there are objects of various sizes on the stage as well as multiple performers, the performance relies on the intercorporeal, phenomenological relations between the spectators, performers and puppets. This intersubjective experience reflects how Michel Foucault described being in the world as a “network that connects points and intersects with its own skein” (qtd. in Aronson, “Technology” 192). By creating this network, PDO allows for the potential

implication of all the bodies in the room in all the actions, and is consequently able to interrogate the connections between victims and torturers, witnesses and actors, and the global and local. Through overlapping these apparent binaries, PDO complicates spectators' attempts to make meaning of the piece. Instead, the spectators' own experiences in the world let them to make their own links when meaning is elusive. This network also makes the production potentially political through the phenomenological experience of the spectator.



Figure 3. Claudius pours poison into Hamlet's father's ear.

In *Máquina Hamlet*, the performers actively acknowledge the audience's role in this network. Both the performers and puppets constantly break away from scenes in order to look out at the audience. This interaction clearly stands out in the first scene, 'Family Scrapbook.' During a recreation of scenes from Hamlet's life story, a small puppet Claudius is about to kill Hamlet's father, who is also represented as a puppet. However, before pouring poison into Hamlet's father's ear, Claudius slowly looks out at the audience and holds out his chalice out to

them (Figure 3). This metatheatricity relates to *Hamletmachine*'s major hypotext, *Hamlet*, in which the same action is performed in a *mise en abyme*, "The Murder of Gonzago." This is not the earliest example of audience implication in *Máquina Hamlet* as, upon entering the playing space, audience members are given different numbers to pin on their shirts. Partway through the performance a lottery takes place, with the number sixty-nine being drawn from a box and shown to the audience (Figure 4). Two performers then go into the audience to look for the person with the number sixty-nine pinned to them. After some searching, they find that a life-sized mannequin has won and pull it out from within the audience. The two performers then shoot the mannequin, pin the corpse to a wall and encourage audience members to throw darts at it (Knowles, "Urban" 75). The interaction between the performers and audience has political ramifications as the audience is physically brought into the violent actions. While the performers encourage this audience participation, at no point is any spectator coerced into contributing. Ana Durán claims when she saw the show the audience laughed nervously as the numbers were drawn, not knowing whether their number would be chosen. This desire to be spared from participating in the violence reflects Müller's text as mid-way through it The Actor Playing Hamlet claims "I don't take part any more" and "I won't play along anymore" (56). Even though they are saved from being the victim of the gunshot, audience members are still made a part of the violence through the dart throwing. Veronese claims that some spectators usually agree to throw darts at the mannequin ("El Periférico"). This scene shifts from initially implicating the audience as potential victims to

implicating them as potential torturers. However, this interaction also simultaneously has the potential to emphasize the act of spectating and the guilt inherent in watching. The spectators are also included by proxy in the small puppet show. As various moments are being recreated with the dolls, other headless Barbie and Ken dolls are placed in front of the action as spectators. Once several dolls are watching, two other dolls crush and destroy this entire doll audience. This situation relates to the blurring of the line between active participants and witnesses, which will be elaborated on in the discussion of the political side of PDO's production at the end of the chapter.



Figure 4. The winning lottery number is drawn.



Figure 5. Two performers and the Müller-puppet.

One particular body repeatedly referred to during the onstage violence is a life-size puppet that looks like Heiner Müller. The face of the puppet is made of latex, which is formed to mimic Müller's facial structure – most prominently his nose and cheekbones. However, like all the other mannequins – and unlike Müller – the puppet has no hair. He also does not wear Müller's signature wide-rimmed glasses (Figure 5). Throughout the show, this puppet is treated as a voyeur watching the scenes of violence he himself had a hand in creating. In 'Family Scrapbook' PDO recreates scenes from the *Hamlet* story and forces the Müller-puppet to watch. Both the human performers and marionettes look at him at various points in this scene – the most notable occurrence is when the puppets portraying Claudius and Hamlet's father both look at Müller and then bow to him. During other scenes of violence, the performers suddenly stop what they are doing and look at the Müller-puppet. The constant recognition of the Müller-

puppet does not negate the intersubjective relations the production relies on. In fact, a relationship is created between the Müller-puppet and the audience through the performers' manipulation. While one performer takes the Müller-puppet's head and turns it to look at the audience, another performer also manipulates the puppet's head so that he appears to resist this action.

The inclusion of the Müller-puppet in the action plays with a popular – but disputed – belief that *Hamletmachine* is about Müller's own life. Müller himself teased those who read the play as autobiographical by stating “That was then interpreted HamletMachine = H.M. = Heiner Müller. This reading I circulated with care” (qtd. in Kalb, “On” 49-50). This statement reveals the complexity of Müller's self-implication in his work. *Hamletmachine* includes the stage direction “*Photograph of the author...Tearing of the author's photograph*” (57), which invokes Müller's playful awareness of postmodern discussions about the death of the author. However, by including Müller as a puppet character, PDO also recognizes that Müller could never fully escape the role of the author. Jonathan Kalb notes that Müller unwittingly became a new type of author as “his crusade against received culture has rejoined him with his patrimony; his ravenous reading and incessant wielding of references have made him into a new kind of master author whose identity is a pastiche of other identities” (“On” 60). The Müller-puppet interrogates this “master author” identity by questioning Müller's own infallibility. According to Knowles, with the inclusion of this Müller-mannequin, PDO makes Müller both become the automaton his text dreams of and the spectator of the horrific world he envisioned (“Urban” 75). This aesthetic

choice also implicates Müller as a proxy for the German Democratic Republic. Near the end of his life, Müller admitted to speaking to the Stasi, although the extent of this relationship is still debated. Regardless, after Müller's ban was removed he became a person of importance in East Germany – a status that placed him closer to the ruling minority than most of the population. By including the Müller-puppet as a voyeuristic presence, PDO emphasizes his unique and problematic status as one who is both supported by and critical of the regime.

By forcing this puppet to constantly look at the audience, PDO keeps the audience involved in the implication of Müller. This mutual awareness – from both the puppet and the audience – makes the “Photograph of the author” scene especially disturbing. While Müller's stage directions are spoken in the voiceover, two of the performers take the Müller-puppet and strip him, revealing a wooden body underneath that complicates the simultaneous human and material nature of the puppet. The body is then methodically taken apart limb by limb, and the remaining pieces are put on hooks on the back wall (Figure 6). This scene is repeated in the puppet show at the end of the performance. While a disturbing image in itself, the destruction of the Müller puppet is made more potent through his previously established relationship with the spectators. Even as he is being destroyed, one performer forces him to look at the audience and hold a gun to his head while another moves him so that he appears to resist these actions. Although the Müller-puppet watches the events he had a hand in creating, the spectators are also implicated as voyeurs themselves when they watch the destruction of the puppet. The uncanny nature of the Müller puppet – he is clearly not human and

yet resists when the puppeteers begin to pull him apart – further adds to the disturbing nature of the scene. Wagner believes the suffering of the puppet is painful to the spectator because, even though they recognize the materiality of the puppet, its liveliness cannot be denied. The perception of the puppet as both material and alive reflects the central conflict of human existence. When the Müller puppet is destroyed, the line between the puppet’s materiality and liveliness becomes blurred, just as the relationship between life and death – and their role in it - is blurred for the spectator (Wagner 135-136). The puppet’s agency – or lack thereof – is also blurred, which leads to broader questions about the spectators’ agency in quotidian existence.



Figure 6. Two performers take the Müller-puppet apart.

Spectators as Co-Writers, Victims, Perpetrators and More

The interrogation of the roles of torturer and victim is an important aspect of PDO's work as they aim to explore the "in-between" both aesthetically and politically. Veronese states "Queremos expresar una situación de periferia, de zonas entre la vida y la muerte, entre el bien y el mal, la posibilidad de ser víctima o victimario"⁷ (qtd. in Ramos). As discussed in Chapter One, the complex nature of these opposites primordially exists in Müller's text. When considering the role of a spectator implied in this intersubjective network, it is important to acknowledge that intersubjectivity does not imply a singular, static subject position shared by all. Rather, the form of contemporary intersubjective perception linked to intermediality puts meaning onto the spectator, who is linked to all other bodies, but still autonomous. Inherent in the text of *Hamletmachine* is the expectation that contemporary spectators will be active participants in the creation of meaning when confronted with gaps and simultaneity. This is an important aspect of postdramatic theatre. Karen Jürs-Munby describes postdramatic writings as "'open' or 'writerly' texts for performance, in the sense that they require the spectators to become active co-writers of the (performance) text" (6). As was mentioned in Chapter One, Müller's works overload the spectator so that they can never take in everything at once. With *Máquina Hamlet*, PDO further complicates this authorial layering.

In Müller's text, the action begins with a mirroring of scenes from *Hamlet*. After this point, the action becomes a complicated and difficult to follow string of

⁷ "We want to express an in-between situation, of zones between life and death, between the good and bad, the possibility of being the victim or the murderer"

quotations spoken by voices rather than clear-cut characters. Similarly, PDO's production begins with long and slow scenes that are then exploded when they are repeated with a difference. This centripetal and then centrifugal pattern affects reception as PDO's postdramatic aesthetic leads the audience to the verge of making sense of the piece right before the text is exploded. In *Máquina Hamlet*, the company disturbs any sense of a clearly discernible meaning by beginning in a narrative, telling mode before breaking from the actions described in Müller's text and creating a scenic tableau with ambiguous referents. In the opening scene, 'Family Scrapbook,' the performers use small puppet-objects to perform aspects of Hamlet's life clearly referred to in Müller's text. These include the poisoning of Hamlet's father by Claudius and the subsequent marriage of his mother to the murderer. García Wehbi confirms the choice to begin in a traditional narrative mode was a conscious attempt to build an expectation which could then be abandoned (Durán). After this scene, the signifiers onstage are of ambiguous origin and have no clear meaning in reference to the Hamlet story or any other coherent whole. This allows for a multiplicity of interpretations from spectators. One moment frequently discussed in reception of the production is the first appearance of the female in the red dress, who most assume to be Ophelia. During this scene, the female [Felicitas Luna] sits in an enclosed and fully lit area center stage, while three performers with rat masks continually come up and sniff her before running back into the shadows. The object she is contained within has been variously interpreted as "type of cage or brothel showcase" (de Toro 6), "an

observation cell” in a laboratory (Durán), and “a peepshow book, or Ulrike Meinhoff’s [sic] witness stand” (Strahler 204).

In order to activate the audience and encourage them to find their own sense of meaning in the piece, PDO continually uses absence, slowness and minimalism. According to Lehmann, these techniques “provoke the spectator’s own imagination to become active on the basis of little raw material to work with” (90). While dramatic theatre tends to foreground one sign at a time, postdramatic theatre, even when working with sparseness, can create an experience of simultaneity and multiplicity through the use of multiple signs at any one moment. Lehmann notes that this effect can strain the spectators’ ability to process information, which leads to “the *parceling of perception*” in which the significance of and relationship between various signs is impossible to comprehend concretely (88). In lieu of a coherent whole, the spectator has the freedom to decide what to focus on and make connections between. However, the cost of this freedom is the inability to ever have a complete or definitive understanding of the production. Even though there is not an excess of visuals onstage at any point in *Máquina Hamlet*, PDO still manages to generate simultaneity, mainly through the constant use of the Müller text in voiceover and a soundscape. This soundscape includes dirges, organ music and human sounds that include grunting and wailing. While at times the soundscape is harmonious with the action, such as when Hamlet’s father’s funeral is accompanied by a dirge, frequently the soundscape and the actions clash. An example of this is when the performers in rat masks dance with mannequins to a militaristic song.

While the music is upbeat, the action onstage becomes disturbing as the performers begin to violently beat their dance partners. The voiceover of Müller's text also wavers between highlighting and clashing with the action onstage. For Mónica Berman, this was one of the main ways she was provoked to construct her own interpretation. She reports:

Como no son voces que los personajes asumen como propias, ellos no entran en contradicción con lo que dicen sino que la disyunción pasa por la imposibilidad que tiene la palabra de dar cuenta de cualquier construcción de realidad. La síntesis queda a cargo del espectador que es el que percibe simultáneamente verbo y acto y que es el responsable de acceder a esa trama como pueda.⁸

Another way PDO facilitates simultaneity within their sparse aesthetic is through the use of a slideshow. This event takes place after a lengthy set-up in which the mannequins are placed in chairs facing the back wall, which acts as the projection surface (Figure 7). This set-up involves simultaneity and visibly obscured action – both of which invoke a contemporary mode of perception as each individual can only receive pieces of the action, rather than any complete whole. The simultaneity is created by having two performers setting up the mannequins while a third gets members of the audience to throw darts at the corpse of the mannequin shot during the lottery scene. At the same time, the

⁸ “As there are no voices that the characters take on as their own, they do not enter into a contradiction with what they say. Instead the disjunction occurs through the impossibility of the word to account for any construction of reality. Synthesis is left to the viewer who perceives both the word and the act, and who is responsible for accessing what they can from this web.”

arrangement of the mannequins in chairs is only partially visible as the only light on the stage is a practical held and constantly moved by one of the performers. The action during the slideshow also uses simultaneity. While the voiceover and a soundscape of banging noises are played and slides are being shown, the performers loudly take individual mannequins out of their chairs and beat them. This action is juxtaposed with the images on the slides, which include crowds of protesters, burning cars, explosions, helicopters, police riot squads, graffiti and a UN vehicle.



Figure 7. Mannequins watching the slideshow.

As the beating of the mannequins becomes more intense and difficult to ignore, so does the slideshow, which increases in speed and begins to repeat images at random. The soundscape also becomes increasingly distorted. The simultaneous overflow of onstage elements can frustrate and confuse audience members. Ric Knowles notes that when he saw the production at Montreal's Festival of the Americas, the action by the live performers "disrupted the attention of annoyed spectators" during the slideshow ("Urban" 75). Lehmann acknowledges that simultaneity, while ultimately freeing, can be frustrating for audiences as their "desire for orientation turns out to be disavowed" (88). When experiencing a postdramatic production, spectators can become discouraged by their inability to capture a complete experience. Unlike dramatic theatre, which attempts to frame the spectator's understanding, the postdramatic continually complicates the act of watching by denying synthesis and consequently demanding an active spectator. Bruce Weber of *The New York Times* finds the lack of narrative in *Máquina Hamlet* adds to the aesthetic of disruption. He describes the show as "stomach-churning stuff, all the more distressing for the unavailability of any storytelling convention." The lack of cohesion was accentuated for North American audiences who had the additional task of reading subtitles. Walsh notes that this added another layer of fragmentation to the already non-linear piece. He deems that the subtitles give "no clues to the action of the performers, but rather [emphasize] a sense of almost dizzying simultaneity, and, accelerating a design pervasive in *Hamletmachine*, [help] to deflate the idea that words from texts necessarily govern theatrical performances" (24).

In order to build this sense of “dizzying simultaneity,” *Máquina Hamlet*’s spectators are never given moments of inaction in which they can distance themselves from the action. This is an intentional aspect of the performance as Veronese says, “No había representatividad en esos sucesos que permitieran al público comprender y tranquilizarse”⁹ (qtd. in de Toro 7). Throughout the show, PDO denies this sense of relaxation by actively making the space uncomfortable and shocking the audience. One such moment occurs in the small puppet show at the end, during which a bicycle bell sound morphs into an unending oppressive ringing sound. Also in the puppet show, the company plays with shocking the audience’s expectations by having one performer hold a gun to a doll and shoot it while simultaneously making a gunshot sound with his own voice (Figure 8). The performer then shoots the doll a second time; however, this shot is accompanied by a loud and unexpected gunshot sound from the speakers.



Figure 8. About to shoot the Barbie doll.

⁹ “There was no time in the action that allowed the audience to understand and relax.”

When discussing the show's constant and discomfiting violence, Veronese states, "Que la gente salga movilizada, de una forma completamente distinta a la que entró al teatro es algo muy importante. Si una persona sale con dolor de estómago eso es bueno también"¹⁰ (qtd. in Ramos). Over the course of the production's five-year run at the *Teatro San Martin*, Veronese monitored the reception and believed that people were indeed mobilized by what they experienced, as they were frequently visibly shaken even when they could not immediately articulate why the piece had affected them. He notes that audiences engaged fully with both their minds and bodies as they "Veía la obra con su estómago, la escuchaba con su pecho. Sabía de qué estábamos hablando. No entendía quizás su totalidad, pero sentía la obra. Días después comenzaba a digerir el relato"¹¹ ("El Periférico"). This comment reveals how postdramatic, intermedial productions, while frequently difficult to digest, can have a lasting impact rather than a cohesive immediate reaction. Lola Proaño-Gómez, who saw the production in Spain at Cádiz's *Sala Central Lechera*, expresses this situation: "Invadidos por una sensación de desazón, de repugnancia y de profundo desagrado nos era difícil expresar coherentemente lo que habíamos presenciado"¹² (Proaño-Gómez 75).

¹⁰ "It is very important that people leave mobilized, in a way completely different from the way they entered the theatre. If one person leaves with a stomachache that is also good"

¹¹ "saw the play with their stomach and listened to it with their chest. They knew what we were talking about. Perhaps they did not understand it in a total way, but they felt the play. A few days later they began to digest the story."

¹² "As we are overcome by sensations of uneasiness, repulsion and deep displeasure, it is difficult to coherently express what we have witnessed."

Máquina Hamlet and the Historical Cycle of Violence

PDO's production responds to the history of their own country and, more specifically, the violence of the Dirty War. In 1995, the same year *Máquina Hamlet* premiered, the Chief of Staff of Argentina's army went against the official policy of forgetting and began to talk about the events of the war. In his assessment, he claimed "almost all of us are responsible for the fight among Argentines, either by act or omission, by absence or excess, by consent or advice...the deep-seated blame lies in the collective unconscious of the Nation" (qtd. in Taylor, *Disappearing* 257). With this in mind, the implication of the audience has been interpreted as an implication of the inaction of Argentineans during the Dirty War and the continuation of this legacy through the policy of forgetting. For example, Lola Proaño-Gómez believes the first scene, which is performed on a long altar-like table, acts like a Last Supper that foreshadows the betrayal of the Argentinean people by official policy and complacency in the post-dictatorship years (77-78).

While some spectators focus on the links between PDO's production and the company's socio-political context, nothing in the production explicitly states that the violent images are confined to Argentina. In fact, the precise political events that spectators link to *Máquina Hamlet* rely on each individual's background and expectations. The masks used by the male performers exemplify how each spectator's context is important for the creation of meaning (Figure 9). In two scenes, performers wear rat masks, which can be linked to images in Art Spiegelman's graphic novel *Maus* (1986). This novel acts as a memoir for

Spiegelman's father's experience during the Holocaust. In it, the Jewish characters are portrayed as mice, while the Germans are cats and Poles are pigs. In the first volume, several mice wear pig masks to cover up their Jewish background. In the second volume, the use of masks is more complex as Spiegelman – who is already represented as a mouse through the character of Artie – includes frames of himself drawing the book as a human with a mouse mask on. These frames occur after Artie's father has died and include other characters in mouse masks, including Artie's psychiatrist Pavel, a Holocaust survivor (Figure 10). The use of rat masks writes back to Nazi comparisons of Jews to vermin. A 1940 Nazi propaganda film *Der Ewige Jude (The Eternal Jew)* – written by Eberhard Taubert and directed by Fritz Hippler – includes a segment comparing Jews to rats. While images of groups of rats appear on the screen, a voiceover claims “[Rats] represent the elements of sneakiness and subterranean destruction among animals - just as the Jews do among mankind.” Cartoons in the Nazi newspaper, *Der Stürmer*, also frequently portrayed Jews as various types of vermin (Figure 11). García Wehbi has confirmed that Spiegelman's graphic novel influenced PDO's use of rat masks. He finds *Maus* to be an effective example of the portrayal of trauma as it “muestra todo el horror de Auschwitz pero con un distanciamiento producido por las máscaras que tienen los personajes.”¹³ (qtd. in Durán). However, the use of rat masks is not only a reference to *Maus* and anti-Semitism. In recent years, in a reversal of the anti-Semitic stereotype, neo-Nazis

¹³ “shows all of the horror of Auschwitz but with a distance produced by the masks the characters wear.”

are portrayed as rats in graffiti and posters (Figure 12). Thus, the use of rat masks is associated with both perpetrators and victims of the Holocaust.



Figure 9. Two performers wearing rat masks in *Máquina Hamlet*.



Figure 10. Two frames from the second volume of *Maus* (p. 46) that show Pavel's mouse mask.



Figure 11. A cartoon from the Nazi newspaper *Der Stürmer* (March 1937) depicting Jews as mice.



Figure 12. A recent photo of anti-Nazi graffiti in Innsbruck.

Several techniques used in *Maus* can also be linked to PDO's aesthetic approach. The two volumes rely on techniques of metafiction, with the memoir acting as a *mise en abyme*. As previously stated, this is not a new technique, and Shakespeare used it in Müller's principal source text, *Hamlet*, with "The Murder of Gonzago." In *Maus*, Spiegelman places himself within the work through the character Artie – a graphic novelist who is interviewing his father about his experiences during the Holocaust. Most of the time, the novel exists in two different time periods simultaneously: New York and the Catskills in the 1980s and Poland before and during the Second World War. García Wehbi notes the effectiveness of the two simultaneous spaces: "En el trasfondo del comic es muy terrible lo que está sucediendo y al mismo tiempo es muy siniestro, pero se digiere por otro lado"¹⁴ (qtd. in Durán). Although it follows a more traditional narrative pattern than *Máquina Hamlet*, by having these times and places intersect *Maus* reflects the intersubjectivity at play in the creation of contemporary subject positions. These two times and places inform one another and deny the possibility of a metanarrative as Artie's father constantly contradicts what Artie has read in books about the Holocaust, and specifically Auschwitz. The father's unstable memories about the time period give the reader a personal – yet possibly faulty – interpretation of the events. Alison Landsberg believes this aspect of *Maus* "problematizes the illusion of immediacy that surrounds testimony" (117). Landsberg also relates the overlapping spaces, which are frequently shown in one

¹⁴ "The events of the comic's back story are both terrible and uncanny at the same time. Yet it is digested in the other space."

frame simultaneously, to Freud through the idea of transference. She calls the in-between space in which the story takes place a “transferential space” in which “the transfer of memory and affect from one person, or situation, to another” (120) occurs. In a similar way, *Máquina Hamlet* implicates all audience members by having each pin a number to their chest. Whether performing in Argentina or abroad, audience members are treated the same and are involved in the violence whether they have lived through a traumatic experience or not. This treatment relates to Diana Taylor’s question about the Dirty War: “The totalitarian spectacle of the Dirty War... was a repetition with no single original. Through what act of negation, of self-blinding, can we maintain that what happens in another country has nothing to do with us?” (*Disappearing* 265).

By implicating all the bodies in the space, whether performer or audience member, in the creation and violent destruction of the puppet-human subject, *Máquina Hamlet* challenges the belief that violent actions are the result of a small number of isolated individuals. Instead, violence is viewed as a totalizing force that links all of society to both the subjectivity of the perpetrator and the victim. As previously discussed, in Müller’s text both Hamlet and Ophelia are immobilized by their inaction even though they both desire revolution and want to be free of their pre-inscribed roles. In *Hamletmachine*, the desire to act and the inability to do so is expressed through Hamlet’s view of himself as “both with and against the crowd, as both revolutionary and reactionary... passive and active” (Walsh 29). Using puppetry to interrogate the in-between allows PDO to critically assess this duality inherent in human nature.

In investigating this political aspect of PDO's work, it is important to acknowledge that, while *Máquina Hamlet* can be received as a production that approaches political topics, it should not necessarily be labeled as political theatre. Lehmann questions whether theatre can even be political in contemporary society as theatre is phenomenologically solipsistic. He posits that "perhaps theatre can never know whether it really 'does' something, whether it effects something and on top of it means something" (180). As previously mentioned, Lehmann discusses the political in the theatre as occurring through a "*politics of perception*" that, in response to a decline in signification, shifts meaning-making onto the bodies of both the spectators and performers (185-6). What will be interrogated in the next section is not what makes this piece of theatre political, but rather the way the company uses potential referents that allow spectators to perceive and structure their own relationship to the action. Important in this analysis is the fusion of both local and global referents, which allows PDO to work centrifugally, exploding the possibilities for the audience.

By staging intersubjective relations, PDO suggests that the audience is not guilt-free. Rather, the act of watching violence is part of the action itself. In Müller's text, there is a sense that the characters are guilty of being part of the cycle of violence and yet yearn to break free. The most notable moment in which this occurs is when The Actor Playing Hamlet proclaims, "I want to be a machine" (57). Becoming a machine would allow Hamlet to escape his prescribed role, which is inevitably linked to violence. Kirk Williams believes that this line goes beyond Hamlet's own subject position and is in fact an escape from

suffering, and from sexual, cultural and psychological binaries (“Ghost” 196). This escape is also related to the failure of patriarchal power as Hamlet has a dystopian dream of surrendering. In the lines before this proclamation, The Actor Playing Hamlet states “I don’t want to die anymore. I don’t want to kill anymore” (57). With this statement, The Actor Playing Hamlet acknowledges that he already exists in an intersubjective position as he is both the perpetrator of crimes and the victim. It is thus an inevitably futile escape – emphasized in PDO’s production where humans control cyborg bodies – as Hamlet seeks to escape an intersubjective subject position by entering another.

While *Hamletmachine* emphasizes the futility of trying to break out of a cycle of violence, PDO’s production highlights the importance of the attempt in itself by including two bodies – one human and one object – that stand out from the rest. The first body [Felicitas Luna] is made distinct from the other human performers through her costume – a red dress. Both this dress and her long gloves are blood red, a colour that stands out against the dull tones of other onstage elements. Mónica Berman views the red colour as a clear link between this female and Ophelia, as Müller’s Ophelia refers to her bloody hands and going out into the street covered in blood. The image of blood is also linked to Argentina’s violent past and relates to many political groups including German Socialism, Nazism, and followers of nineteenth-century Argentinean leader Juan Manuel de Rosas, who wore red bands on their arms. The potential of this colour to signify both communist and fascist beliefs highlights the in-between state of this body.

The second body is a mannequin dressed in a brown suit with a red flower in the lapel.

Both of these bodies wear clothes that stand out from the black and white costume of all other performers, which alludes to their non-conformity. The idea of conformity through one's clothing is an element of the production that is perhaps more comprehensible for Argentinean audiences, as controlling physical appearance was an important official policy during the Dirty War. Flyers distributed by the military regime included images of how one should dress (Figure 13), and strict dress codes were enforced in schools and other public arenas. The regime made clear distinctions between the dress codes of males and females in an attempt to crack down on what it considered to be deviant behaviour (Taylor, *Disappearing* 105-7). Although the two bodies in PDO's production differ in terms of their materiality, they have similar fates as the victims of violent acts. First, the female is dragged offstage by two rat-performers at the end of her first scene. Then, the mannequin in the brown suit is shot for winning the lottery. Finally, after lighting a table on fire, the female is violently taken off a second time at the end of the show. By including these non-conforming bodies, PDO incorporates the potential to break free from being victims and oppressors under the weight of an inevitable cycle of history.

While both the man in the brown suit and the Müller-puppet are destroyed, most violent acts in *Máquina Hamlet* affect the female bodies who stand out in the generally homosocial world of the performance. According to Diana Taylor, from colonization onwards, Argentinean women were both feared and venerated.



Figure 13. Drawings from a military flyer showing how to dress and how not to dress.

The most internationally recognizable example of how women embodied this “virgin/whore stereotype” is Eva Perón (Taylor, *Disappearing* 49). Evita also exemplifies, both literally and metaphorically, how Argentinean political struggles frequently invoke the female body as a site of conflict. After her death, Evita’s corpse was embalmed and prepared for burial in a massive tomb; however, when Juan Perón’s government was overthrown, her body disappeared for sixteen years. It was eventually returned to Juan Perón in Spain and then taken back to Argentina (50). In the Dirty War, the battle for society’s hearts and minds also centered on women and their bodies. The group *Madres de Plaza de Mayo*, or Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo, was, according to Antonius C.G.M. Robben, “the public face of the nonviolent resistance movement against the dictatorship” (299). This group began as a grassroots movement of mothers whose children had been abducted by the military regime. Starting in April 1977, they would meet in

front of the Presidential Palace in Buenos Aires' Plaza de Mayo on Thursdays to make the disappearance of their children visible. Although the police intimidated them, their numbers and the openness of their actions made it difficult for the government to crack down on them while maintaining public order. By the time the government finally arrested and abducted some of the women, the cause had become too large to completely put a stop to (Robben 301-304). As part of their non-violent protest, the Madres wore pictures of their missing daughters and sons pinned to their shirts, and wrote words of protest on their clothing (Figure 14). In response to the photos worn by the Madres, the regime had their own female supporters wear signs stating "*Los argentinos somos derechos y humanos*" ("Argentines are human and right") (Taylor, *Disappearing* 78-9), a play on the term "human rights" which literally put the debate onto female bodies (Figure 15). The Madres were also threatening to the regime, as they, through their dual role as mothers and resisters, existed outside the binary of women as either ideal mother figures or degenerate sexual threats to the military dictatorship.

In *Máquina Hamlet* the female character also embodies this whore/virgin stereotype and highlights how it allows women to be potentially destabilizing forces in totalitarian regimes. Ric Knowles, who saw the production at Montreal's Festival of the Americas, believes the female performer "moved through the show like a blood stain, and like, perhaps, Argentina's own *Madres de Plaza de Mayo*, made prominent by a silent presence that spoke refusal" ("Urban" 75). While Knowles links her presence to the Madres, it is important to appreciate his use of the word "perhaps," which emphasizes the multiplicity of possible meanings and

associations for audience members. Rather than clearly representing the Madres or any other recognizable female such as *Hamlet's* Ophelia, her presence reflects the binaries that women represent both in history and in Müller's text. Although many reviewers name this performer as Ophelia, this is only one aspect of her performed subjectivity.



Figure 14. Madres de Plaza de Mayo with writing on their clothing.



Figure 15. Government workers wearing stickers that say, “Argentines are human and right.”

Links between this female performer and Müller’s text highlight the potentially in-between nature of the female body. Kirk Williams notes – in a description similar to Taylor’s of Evita - that “Müller’s notion of gender is thoroughly informed by myth. Ophelia is the quintessential victim/whore/murderess/revolutionary” (“Ghost” 193). In *Máquina Hamlet*, the first binary – that of the victim and the whore – is clearly established in the female performer’s first two appearances. In her first scene, she is confined to a box and tormented by the male performers in rat masks. In the next scene, she stands out as the one woman who is not abused while the actors with rat masks dance with and violently abuse mannequins in dresses. In *Hamletmachine*, the revolutionary, and even terrorist, aspect of Ophelia’s persona exists in the text through her quotation of a Manson family member. Brian Walsh believes this “appropriation of the language of terrorism creates her as a figure with whom identification provokes

uneasiness” (32). In *Máquina Hamlet* the female bodies’ potentially destructive side reflects their revolutionary spirit. In ‘Family Scrapbook’ – before the female performer’s first appearance – a female marionette removes a candle from the tabernacle and places it close to the Müller-puppet on the table. This foreshadows the final image of *Máquina Hamlet*, in which the female performer burns the only table remaining on the set.

Unlike the male mannequin who is visibly shot for no apparent reason, the female performer’s final act of violence is not simply an inevitable aspect of her revolutionary side – it is a response to the culmination of violent acts against women that occur throughout the production. In the years after the Dirty War, information came out revealing that torturers abused women’s reproductive organs. Diana Taylor claims “Women were annihilated through a metonymic reduction to their sexual ‘parts’: wombs, vaginas, breasts... Testimonies repeatedly allude to guns shot into vaginas and wombs, to breasts being pounded, to buttocks and mouths being ripped open” (*Disappearing* 84). The fragmentation of the female body into individual parts is reflected in the dim lighting design of PDO’s production, which at times solely illuminates individual body parts such as hands. Violence against women – and specifically against their ability to reproduce – is first seen in *Máquina Hamlet*’s opening scene, ‘Family Scrapbook.’ When the voiceover says “Ahora te arranco el vestido de novia. Ahora hay que gritar. Ahora embadurno los harapos de tu vestido de novia con el

lodo que se convirtió en mi padre,”¹⁵ the Hamlet marionette stabs his mother in her vagina with a sword (Figure 16).



Figure 16. The Hamlet doll about to stab his mother.

While this image is violent on its own, it is just one of many violent actions performed against the female bodies onstage. The most extensive violence against women occurs in the cabaret scene, in which the rats’ abuse of the mannequins includes punching their vaginas and anally raping them. What makes this violence especially disturbing is that these actions are interspersed with comedic slapstick violence against the dolls that includes dropping them by mistake. All of this violence culminates in the puppet show at the end. In the recreation of various

¹⁵ “Now I tear the wedding dress. Now one must scream. Now I smear the pieces of your wedding dress with the earth my father has turned into”

scenes from the previous hour, three headless Ken dolls repeatedly abuse several headless Barbie dolls until only the Ken dolls appear to be alive. Even the recreation of the destruction of the Heiner Müller puppet is done using a Barbie rather than a Ken doll.

The production ends with the female performer being forcibly taken off by two other performers after she lights the table on fire. Ophelia's use of fire is a continuation of PDO's critical stance towards Müller as it reverses the way Müller directed the play in 1990's *Hamlet/Machine*. Instead of leaving the audience with the continuing potential of the revolutionary spirit as PDO does, Müller has Ophelia engulfed by flames at the end (Romanska 73). While PDO's production shows the female's agency through her final action, her forced removal from the stage complicates this reference to Müller's production. Although this image mirrors the act of being disappeared - both in Argentina and in other countries under authoritarian rule - it is the second time in the production that this happens, which suggests she has the potential to return again and continue to disrupt the established system.¹⁶ Williams discusses how in contemporary society:

Bodies have become weapons that can wreck the world or at least radically change its direction; the suicide bomber is perhaps the most over-determined and sensationalized emblem of the new

¹⁶ The construction "to be disappeared" is commonly used in discussions of the Dirty War. Those who went missing under the military rule are usually referred to as "the disappeared" (for examples see Robben; Taylor, *Disappearing*). Both of these terms correlate to Spanish structures. In Spanish the verb *ser*, or "to be," is used with "*desaparecido*" ("disappeared"), and those who disappeared are called "*los desaparecidos*" ("the disappeared"). For examples, see Alvarado, "Autorretrato" and Proaño-Gómez.

man-machine, the being who, like Müller's Hamlet, aspires to be a perfect, unconscious maker of ruins. Terrorism is the ultimate theatre of cruelty: all the world is, finally, a stage for its mechanized actors... The mechanical man may be a subversive figure, free of the psychic and meta-physical wounds that we all bear, but he is also obedient, moving only from the centre in response to a touch or a call. ("Ghost" 200)

Unlike the mechanized Hamlet that Williams describes, in *Máquina Hamlet* the female threatens all the other bodies onstage as she exists in-between and therefore cannot be predictable. As both virgin and whore, mother and revolutionary, this female has agency even after the play has ended. This ambiguous ending, along with the lack of information surrounding the female's context, allows the audience to fill in this gap whatever way they see fit. While the violent way in which she is taken offstage may imply to some that she will have a fate similar to the children of the Madres, this interpretation is not universal. Marcela Arpes, who saw the production in Argentina, believes *Máquina Hamlet* ends optimistically, with the expectation that "después de la destrucción total, algo nuevo surgirá de entre las cenizas, quizá un mundo con valores y relaciones renovadas."¹⁷ This belief reflects the way the production puts the onus onto the spectators, who receive the ending through their own socio-political context. Some critics of the Müller text also back up this interpretation. For example, Teraoka believes that while "It is an uneasy ending, [it is] full of

¹⁷ "after the total destruction, something new will emerge from the ashes, possibly a world with values and renewed relationships"

promise for future revolutions staged by the victims of history” (*Silence* 112). Brian Walsh has a different view of the violence associated with the female through Ophelia. Rather than seeing potential for a new world order through her revolutionary actions, he believes that in the Müller text her actions are “a response to oppression but it is a regressive response that provokes state sanctioned violence to restore order, initiating a perhaps endless cycle of violent transactions between rulers and the ruled” (32-33).

One potential obstacle to audience involvement in *Máquina Hamlet* is PDO’s reliance on a fourth wall. While audience members are physically incorporated into the violence against the man in the brown suit, PDO does not go as far in physically implicating the audience as other examples of Argentinean theatre do. Griselda Gambaro’s play *Información para extranjeros* (*Information for Foreigners*, 1973), which is set in a house rather than a theatre, exemplifies how a play that deals with Argentina’s violent history can physically implicate an audience. When the audience arrives at the house for a performance, they are split into two groups and led through the house by a guide. Each group witnesses disturbing scenes, including one in which a planted actor is disappeared by a group of men (Taylor, *Disappearing* 126-7). In contrast, instead of forcing the audience to go to certain places or clearly involving each individual body, PDO puts the onus on the spectators who can actively decide how involved they want to be based on their own socio-political context and subject position. For example, PDO’s socio-political context can undermine their use of violence onstage for some spectators. Amy L Strahler, who saw the production at the Brooklyn

Academy of Music, believes that the show's "Exaggerated, staged violence revealed a culture still grieving in the aftermath of a Dirty War. Yet, the violence struck me at times as gratuitous and sentimental" (204). Strahler was not the only critic to focus on the violence in Argentina's past. Pat Donnelly, of Montreal's *The Gazette*, sarcastically claims "Apparently nobody in Argentina has forgotten the 'disappeared.' And if tearing Shakespeare apart helps this company honour the dead, well, so be it." Although meant to be a negative assessment of the production, Donnelly's comment highlights how PDO links the act of remembering to *Hamletmachine*'s theme of annihilation. Donnelly picks up on PDO's anxiety over communal forgetting, as the act eradicates memory. This ideology of annihilation is both aesthetic and political for PDO as it informs their use of violence onstage and comments on contemporary political situations.

Alvarado and García Wehbi also noticed that when presenting their shows in Europe, the audiences frequently placed the violence in South America even though nothing in the show explicitly locates it there (Lettieri 99-100). By containing their reception of the production within their understanding of PDO's context, these spectators refuse to implicate themselves in the action. On the other hand, Ric Knowles, who saw the production at the Festival of the Americas like Donnelly, felt personally implicated as the production "confronted audience complicity in political tortures and murders" (*Reading* 190). Knowles sutures himself into the action onstage by recognizing the violence as both specific and universal. While performed by an Argentinean group after the Dirty War, *Máquina Hamlet* can expose a more universal cycle of violence that García

Wehbi refers to as an “unfinishable chain of violence that history repeats again and again throughout the world. It can be in different places, in different moments, but it is always going on” (qtd. in Spabler).

Máquina Hamlet: The Intersubjective Nature of Mediated Images

The potentially universal aspect of the violence in *Máquina Hamlet* relates to the mediatization of experience and memory in contemporary society. With the predominance of mass mediums, memory is no longer reliant on first-hand lived experiences. Rather, according to Alison Landsberg, “Mass culture makes particular memories more widely available, so that people who have no ‘natural’ claim to them might nevertheless incorporate them into their own archive of experience” (9). Because of this, memories are no longer limited to groups with shared national or religious histories; instead, memories are more fluid and can potentially be a part of any individual’s context (11). Landsberg names this form of memory, which relies on mediatization and intersubjective relations rather than national or geographic limits, as *prosthetic*. While *Máquina Hamlet* uses images that spectators may associate with political situations they have not lived through, the images are not completely foreign to any spectator who has been close to a TV, film or computer screen recently. Rather than existing as something outside of lived experience, Landsberg emphasizes that, although this form of memory relies on mediatization, a spectator still “experiences [it] as real or genuine” (17). When discussing *Máquina Hamlet*, the show’s dramaturg Dieter Welke expresses how contemporary modes of perception can make mediated images more

powerful than experiences of quotidian existence. She describes how the production:

habla de alguna manera de la mirada sobre esa realidad sociopolítica cruda y terrible cuando no nos toca directamente. Acostumbrados a una relación con la violencia por medio de los medios, de la televisión, podemos expresar quejidos y hacer muecas ante las terribles escenas que nos brinda el aparato en la mitad de nuestro living...Auschwitz es mucho más terrible cuando lo veo por T.V. desde casa comiendo fideos.”¹⁸ (qtd. in Veronese, “El Periférico”)

Landsberg also argues that prosthetic memory has the power to radically alter our subject positions. She states that when we “[take] on prosthetic memories of traumatic events...the disenfranchisement and loss of privilege that such an experience often necessitates can have a profound effect on our politics” (3). When watching *Máquina Hamlet*, spectators view traumatic events regardless of their own socio-political background. Any response to this experience not only reflects one’s own subject position, but also has the potential to alter one’s existing subjectivity. As it is theatre, the production relies on interactions between people; however, how each individual receives the images may be very different. In this way, prosthetic memory is linked to intersubjectivity as it does not rely on

¹⁸ “speaks to a certain way of seeing a crude and terrible sociopolitical reality even when it does not touch us directly. As we are accustomed to experiencing violence via mediums such as television, we actively express ourselves through groans and grimaces when we see the terrible scenes coming from the device in the middle of our living room...Auschwitz is much more horrible when we see it on TV in our house while eating noodles.”

similarities between individuals, but still has an impact on the body of the spectator (Landsberg 8). This is an important aspect of postdramatic theatre as well. Lehmann explains that:

Considered from the point of view of reception, the retreat of synthesis is a matter of the freedom to react arbitrarily, or rather involuntarily and idiosyncratically. The ‘community’ that arises is not one of similar people, i.e. a community of spectators who have been made similar through commonly shared motifs (the human being in general), but instead a common contact of different singularities who do not melt their respective perspectives into a whole but at most share or communicate affinities in small groups.
(84)

Thus, in choosing the extent to which they want to be implicated in the action and violence, spectators of *Máquina Hamlet* are actively engaging in the ongoing creation of their own subjectivity – a subjectivity that, while individual, relies on connections with other bodies. Viewing the production may have, as Landsberg describes, “a profound effect on our politics”; however, this effect is completely reliant on how one receives the violence inflicted upon both the puppet-dolls and the human bodies. The intentional ambiguity and lack of narrative allows spectators to fill in the gaps, or choose not to, which may or may not involve self-implication. The responsibility placed on the spectators in this production relates to the role of average citizens during the Dirty War. Although kidnappings were referred to as disappearances during the Dirty War, they were

highly public events. When people were taken away, the act was visible to neighbours, as cars with sirens would arrive and entire blocks were blockaded (Taylor, *Disappearing* 98). Many citizens chose not to look or to deny that they had seen anything happen when neighbors were taken away (124). This human desire to be placed apart from the action is part of the reception of *Máquina Hamlet* as the choice is placed within the audience.

Remaining Questions

Unlike many of the other Müller adaptations highlighted in the first chapter, PDO's approach is steeped in the postdramatic, both ideologically and aesthetically. In contrast, *The Aboriginal Protesters*, *Gulliver's Choice* and *Scheherazade Goes West* are primarily textual adaptations that reframe Müller's plays. *The Aboriginal Protesters* is a particularly problematic example as it has a linear plotline that makes Müller more accessible for English-speaking audiences, but in the process also makes a closed dramatic adaptation out of an open postdramatic text. Rather than declawing Müller's dense material by creating an adapted text, PDO explodes *Hamletmachine* through the integration of text and visual images. By focusing on staging, PDO respects Müller's wish that directors use his plays "as association material, as a kind of supernova which inspires directors with ideas" (qtd. in Friedman, "Cultural" 4). Yet, while the members of PDO clearly have respect for Müller and his text, they are also critical of him in much the same way he was critical of those who came before him. They interact with him postdramatically, which opens up his work to an infinite number of

interpretations. This approach takes on critiques that claim Müller is too Eurocentric to be accessible to non-Germans. Instead, the production's transportability is part of its lasting power. Although some critics view the production as definitively Argentinean and therefore lacking in universality, this is not the most common opinion. Instead, spectators link *Máquina Hamlet* to trauma experienced the world over and, unlike the overseas reception of *The Aboriginal Protesters*, many critics felt personally implicated in the piece.

The effectiveness of this production leads to some ongoing questions about cross-cultural adaptation in the theatre and Müller's role in contemporary performance practice. PDO's sparse aesthetic relies on a highly skilled use of object theatre, which leads to the question of how other artists can learn from their example while working with different aesthetic goals. The main element that can be taken from this example is the effectiveness of postdramatic adaptation practices, especially with productions that travel globally. These postdramatic techniques make PDO's production both simultaneously local and universal. In my search for Müller productions and adaptations, I discovered there is a tendency is to make his work solely respond to the local because many consider Müller's context entrenched in the now irrelevant issues of the Cold War. The example of *The Aboriginal Protesters* exemplifies how problematic such an approach is.

PDO's production was first produced in 1995, the year in which Müller died. Since Müller's death, events such as 9/11 have changed the meaning of terror and trauma in contemporary society. Thus, there is still an opportunity for

artists to respond to Müller by linking him to contemporary events and perception as PDO did. In the future, attempts to adapt and (re)contextualize Müller will be interesting to watch, especially as postdramatic theatre gains more of a presence outside of Europe. However, the choice to use Müller's work will inevitably lead to questions of relevancy - especially outside of Europe. While PDO was able to make Müller relevant for them, his lasting presence as a source of meaning and commentary is still debatable.

Conclusion

The act of creating theatre always includes some level of adaptation, whether it is actively recognized or not. While there is a tendency among theatre practitioners to idolize celebrated predecessors, theatre can move away from this trend through an acknowledgment and appreciation of the gaps between the adapted and the adaptor. Rather than succumbing to the anxiety of influence and an idealization of the text, postdramatic theatre embraces the adaptive nature of performance in and of itself. Similarly, Müller's writings contain both respect for and derision of his predecessors in his appropriations of their work. When he wrote, he was also aware of his own subject position and created texts that reflect his context-specific terms of reference. While his works are deliberately open, they are also steeped in these Eurocentric, Cold War referents. Effective adaptation of his work ideally recognizes and critically engages with this context. In non-European countries, the specter of Müller's influence is not as prominent – which potentially allows for more open and critical adaptation of his work. However, outside of Europe there is also a tradition of making texts comprehensible for audiences, an approach which potentially denies Müller's intentional ambiguity.

The projects discussed in this thesis are only a handful of a plethora of examples of adaptation in postdramatic theatre. While postdramatic theatre has been accused of being apolitical, these productions reveal how performative (re)contextualization of a postdramatic text can make it relevant for a different

political situation. Even a problematic example, like *The Aboriginal Protesters*, reveals the challenges and intricacies of working on a postdramatic text in a different socio-political performative context. The problems encountered during the creation of *The Aboriginal Protesters*, including othering Müller rather than engaging with him, highlight the effectiveness of El Periférico de Objetos' approach. PDO's production is effective because they stage Müller critically – first through an understanding of his words and then by exploding them through various elements of performance. Just as Müller is intentionally ambivalent and hostile to Shakespeare, PDO treats Müller as a predecessor they both respect and are critical of. PDO also recognizes that for Müller's works to be effective, they must implicate the audience. Writing about Müller's texts, Barnard Turner argues

The informational level – the fact that a play may be about Prussian history, or a particular mode of industrial production, or a Roman myth – which may impede its understanding outside the German-speaking (or at least Europeanized) world is subsumed into the perceptual level, the dialectical overcharge of possible contexts available to any spectator. (195)

PDO recognizes this important part of Müller's work as they implicate spectators, regardless of background, in their performance. It is this recognition that allowed PDO to tour internationally with success.

As this study only includes a few examples of postdramatic practices outside of Europe, this is an area that can be explored further. While there are English-language studies on the political nature of postdramatic theatre, such as

Götz Dapp's *Mediaclash in Political Theatre*, these focus on European productions. In *Postdramatic Theatre*, Hans-Thies Lehmann also focuses on productions and companies from Europe, which is already steeped in postdramatic techniques. While theatre in North America and other areas of the world are still heavily influenced by the legacy of Naturalism and Realism as well as the pressures of creating marketable works, the examples in this thesis reveal an active attempt to engage with postdramatic material outside of Europe. This area of study is a gap in Lehmann's book and an opportunity for further critical analysis. Lehmann also focuses on popular and effective productions – even when discussing *The Aboriginal Protesters* he avoids delving into criticism of the project, and thus ignores the important ways in which the project fails. The possibility that postdramatic texts will fail in production and will not appeal to audiences is another area that requires further study. Additionally, my analysis does not delve into the role of translation in these adaptations. There is a large body of literature on the challenges of translating literary and performance texts; however, as I do not read German fluently, I was unable to assess the differences between Müller's texts and translations for this study. This is, however, an important form of adaptation that should be addressed in relation to both Müller and the postdramatic.

While Müller is still not frequently produced outside of Europe, he is better known worldwide than many European playwrights. His increasing presence and popularity has arguably paved the way for contemporary postdramatic playwrights, such as René Pollesch and Roland Schimmelpfennig.

Although not currently well known outside of Europe, these two playwrights are increasingly being translated into English and other languages. Several Canadian companies have produced Schimmelpfennig's *Arabian Night*. He is also one of several international playwrights commissioned by Toronto's Luminato Festival to write a trilogy of plays about Africa for their 2010 festival. The increasing visibility of postdramatic writers outside of Europe reveals a desire among theatre artists on this side of the Atlantic to engage in a questioning of theatre's continuing efficacy in a mass mediated world. However, as the postdramatic is primarily a European phenomenon, transplanting these works without a critical acknowledgement of the differences between European and other theatre contexts could negate their effectiveness.

Interestingly, Müller's continuing relevance in Germany has also been questioned since his death. This is partially due to the types of productions his works are receiving. In 2004, a production of *Der Auftrag* at Berlin's *Freie Volksbühne* directed by Ulrich Mühe was heavily criticized for being overly commercial, with glossy advertising, American style sponsorship and a large cast of movie stars. However, Lydia Stryk also notes that these decisions all ironically make Müller increasingly relevant in a post-9/11 world. She cites Ekkehardt Krippendorf's review of the production for *Freitag*, which suggests that the commercialism highlights "Unintentionally – but not accidentally – the nature of our lifeless consumer-driven society and its class divisions" (qtd. in Stryk 34). The controversy about this German production reveals that (re)contextualizing Müller is not only done outside of Europe. Because of the postdramatic nature of

his texts, interpretations and connections made with them are endless. Alongside this endless cycle of (re)contextualization and (re)politicization, critical analysis of his work, and productions, is also an ongoing project. In our current post-9/11 socio-political context, information, news and ideas are spreading at an ever-increasing speed. Postdramatic theatre has potential as a tool for interrogating new political situations and questions as they arise. In the future - in a mirroring of Müller's own aesthetics - productions of his plays will likely continue to link his dark and dense texts to current political situations. However, the efficacy of such projects will depend on interaction with Müller's aesthetic and ideological goals, which open up possibilities, rather than narrowing them.

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